

# Mayans in the News

*A study of the formation of post-conflict identities in Guatemala*

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Picture: L. Suchenwirth

*Que no son, aunque sean.  
Que no hablan idiomas, sino dialectos.  
Que no profesan religiones, sino supersticiones.  
Que no hacen arte, sino artesanía.  
Que no practican cultura, sino folklore.*

*They do not exist, even if they exist.  
They do not speak languages, but dialects.  
They do not profess religions, but superstitions.  
They do not make art, but crafts.  
They do not practice culture, but folklore.*

Eduardo Galeano, 1991: *El libro de los abrazos*

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Naturally, the responsibility for any errors or inaccuracies which may have occurred is mine exclusively.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Cultural approaches to conflict resolution**

Almost ten years ago, in December 1996, the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords marked the official end of a 36-year bloody conflict between the Guatemalan army and the guerrilla. Much to the surprise of observers of the conflict, the Peace Accords were preceded by 'The Accord on Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples' signed by government and guerrilla in 1995. The agreement marked the official recognition of a distinctive indigenous issue in a conflict that had taken on ethnic dimensions around 25 years earlier, making it no longer possible to treat Guatemala's indigenous peoples solely as part of a 'landless peasants versus landowning elites' problem. Combined, the 21 Mayan groups of Guatemala hold the majority of the country's citizenship, yet until pressure by Pan-Mayan groups led to the 1995 Agreement, Mayans had been marginalized and excluded politically, economically, socially and culturally since the time of the Spanish conquest. The legacy of marginalization has contributed significantly to the violent conflict, which has been described as one of the most brutal on the continent, and is one of the biggest challenges facing present-day Guatemala.

According to the comprehensive view of conflict resolution by Azar, the origin of conflict is the denial of three types of basic human needs: access or political needs, security or economic needs, and acceptance or cultural needs (1986). A successful conflict resolution process must identify those needs and include ways to address them. As much of the conflict was caused or fuelled by the disempowered position of Guatemala's indigenous people, the basic needs of the Mayans are deemed a paramount aspect for a comprehensive resolution of conflict. This thesis is based on the assumption that while traditional approaches to peace building tend to focus on economic aspects and the political sphere – or the interplay between the two – another important aspect of conflict resolution can also be found on a social and cultural level – the cultural sphere. This includes the adressal of the human needs of recognition and identity. Identity formation can thereby increase or decrease potential conflicts, according to the theoretical framework provided by Manuel Castells (1998).

Like identity, culture is understood as the process of meaning-making within a given social group. Society is kept together by the binding forces of shared

information circulated in an organic system; it is structured primarily by a central element: its value system, the ideational, cultural system. Communication is thus seen as the basis of human fellowship which produces “the social bonds, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible” (Carey: 1989: 22). The news media, as society’s major outlet for communication and main source of information, are an essential part of the cultural sphere (Burgess: 2004).

James Carey defines communication as having two primary functions: control – leading e.g. to political representation in the public sphere - and community building underlining that consensus demands communication (1989). The latter, the so-called the ritual view of communication, includes the sharing and formation of personal values, sentiments and worldviews, thus providing the basis on which to construct and maintain collective identities.

The media, as transmitters of communication, and thus culture, can have the potential to address underlying cultural needs of identity and recognition and thus potentially aid the development of a collective identity - community formation. However, being part of a rather more complex reality, the media could well prove to be a double-edged sword furthering chasms in a deeply parted post-conflict society. Research indicates that minority groups – which for the purpose of this thesis are defined in terms of powerlessness, rather than numbers – are often subject to relative invisibility and demeaning stereotypes (Gross: 1998).

Guatemala is an interesting case for testing these premises, not least because Anthropologist Kay Warren distinguishes between two kinds of representation the Mayan leaders are interested in: First, the democratic representation of formerly marginalized and disenfranchised peoples in all national social institutions, and second, a Maya role in the media through which citizens constitute their identities (2003). While political and economic aspects are of high importance to the peace process, it would be insufficient to view the national media simply as a means to - or obstacle from - political power. Potential projects of comprehensive conflict resolution which focus on a context-specific approach needs to understand and address cultural particularities of the indigenous people.

Commentators from all backgrounds made a range of suggestions addressing economic and political human needs in Guatemala, notably in terms of land reform,

democratisation and human rights<sup>1</sup>. This paper focuses on cultural needs, and argues for the relevance of a cultural needs-based approach to comprehensive conflict resolution in Guatemala. Though economic and political needs are a basic necessity of conflict resolution in Guatemala, it is not the purpose of this paper to explore the importance of cultural needs in relation to other basic needs, nor to argue that the cultural needs of identity and recognition are the most important aspects in conflict resolution<sup>2</sup>. Rather, the discussion points out another aspect to be considered in the complex situation that characterises Guatemala.

## **1.2 Approach**

The thesis provides a case study, applying the theoretical assumptions of Human Needs theory, collective identity formation and Carey's ritual view of communication to the case of Guatemala. My approach is based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of reception theory. I draw on the news reception of five focus groups to comprehend how Mayans and Ladinos read the Guatemalan print media, and which conclusions they infer from their findings, exploring the relation between the news media and collective identity formation, and how and if Mayan cultural needs are addressed in the Guatemalan daily print media. My research is guided by three questions:

- How are the three different identities (indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan) represented by the Guatemalan press?
- What type of identity is being promoted by this press coverage?
- How does this type of identity affect the addressal of cultural needs in Guatemala?

Though my methodology is based in Media Studies, my theoretical assumptions stem from a variety of academic disciplines, true to the interdisciplinary nature of Peace and Conflict Studies. To my knowledge, this logical link between the media's potential of addressing causes for conflict on the basis of cultural needs in post-conflict societies has not been explored before. My thesis can thus only be seen as first shaky steps into a hopefully interesting direction.

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<sup>1</sup> There are countless examples of conflict resolution literature focusing on economic and/or political aspects. As regards to Guatemala, see Krznaric, 1999; Jonas, 2001; Azpuru et al, 2004; Paris 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Neither am I in the position or willing to give policy recommendations based on my findings.

### **1.3 Thesis Outline**

The thesis's structure is divided into three main parts; a methodology and theory part, a part covering Guatemala's history and the political economy of the country's mass media; and an empirical part discussing the findings of my fieldwork.

The remainder of this chapter includes a note on the terminology employed (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), as well as a map and some basic statistics on Guatemala.

Chapter 2 concerns my methodological approach. I outline the concept of reception research and my chosen approach, Jensen's super themes. I will discuss the implications of the method and the focus groups chosen to the study, as well as other implications of my fieldwork in Guatemala.

Chapter 3 outlines a brief introduction to the basic concepts of conflict resolution according to human needs theory and an exploration of the concepts of identity and recognition. It will discuss different sources for the formation of collective identities and outline the significant role of the news' media in the constructing and re-construction of collective identities.

Chapter 4 looks at the two ethnic groups of major relevance to the study, introduces the background to the Guatemalan civil war and highlights challenges facing the country ten years after the signing of the Peace Accords. I will point to the negligence of identity and recognition as one cause of conflicts affecting the country and conclude the chapter by arguing in favour of the relevance of cultural needs for conflict resolution in Guatemala.

Chapter 5 briefly outlines the political economy of the media in Guatemala. I introduce the four publications used for my research and describe some of the difficulties the country's news media are facing at present.

Chapter 6 considers each focus group discussion. For analytical clarity, I divided the participants' discussion into three major themes: The media in Guatemala; media coverage of the country's indigenous people; and Indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan identity. Each group section includes a short discussion, in which I analyse and summarise the groups' narratives and argumentation.



The final chapter summarises the preceding discussion by illuminating how the focus group participants answered the three questions which guided me through my research.

The Appendix includes a list of my interviewees, statistics regarding the media usage of ethnic background of my focus participants, scanned newspaper articles and, crucially, the digital recordings of the focus group discussions.

#### **1.4 A note on terminology**

Throughout the paper the terms indigenous people and Mayans will be used interchangeably, though the Mayans, descendants of the ancient Mayans, are not the only indigenous group in Guatemala. Statistics of Guatemala are considered to be extremely unreliable for a variety of reasons, yet Mayans are believed to be in the region of six million people, meaning that by all accounts, they comprise one half or more of the total population (Adams, 1996a: 157; Handy: 2002).

Additionally, there are around 2000 Xinca, an Indian group both linguistically and culturally different from the Mayans, though others argue that they are today extinct - immersed into the mainstream, European-orientated *Ladino* culture (Bendiksby, 1999: 70). As will be elaborated later on, Ladinos, descendants of conquistadors and Mayans who orientate themselves along Western values, are the other major group in the country. Ladinos and Mayans make up the focus of this study. A fourth group are the 4000 Garifuna, whose ancestors were African slaves settling on the Caribbean coast at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Adams, 1996a: 180).

Mayan is a rather ambiguous term as there are 21 Guatemalan groups falling under this description. These Mayan groups are commonly divided along linguistic lines but the groups also have some other cultural differences. Some of these Mayan languages resemble each other strongly (comparable to Swedish and Norwegian), while others are about as related as German is to Norwegian. Mayans are not only found in Guatemala, but also Honduras, Belize and Mexico. Guatemala is however the only country with a Mayan majority. 'The Accord on Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples' states that "the Mayan people consist of various socio-cultural expressions having a common origin" (MINUGUA, 1995:1). Many present-day Guatemalan Mayans draw strongly on their ancient Mayan heritage by wearing

traditional costumes and following Mayan spirituality, although customs have been influenced by modern day society.

I have deliberately sought not to use the term 'Indian', which is viewed as derogatory in Guatemalan society<sup>3</sup>. As researchers continuously point out, the Guatemalan Mayans were Mayans long before the conquistadors' erroneous notion made them 'Indians'.

The term Maya is, to some, a highly politicised expression. I will try to avoid politically over-interpreting this by focusing on the representation of the Mayans as peoples, rather giving too much attention to the politicised pan-Mayan movement<sup>4</sup>. At the same time however, I deem it important to acknowledge the groups common cultural heritage. For the purpose of discussion about a Mayan identity, I shall not focus on which type of Mayan identity according to their linguistic distinctions, but examine whether some type of Mayan identity per se is acknowledged in the discourse, that allows the group in question to identify their cultural particularity. Of course, it is paramount not to forget that just as in any country in the world, the role ethnic identity plays in Guatemalan's lives varies greatly according to personal lifestyle and the type of ethnic identity a person belongs to.

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<sup>3</sup> An example is the expression 'que indio' – 'how Indian', which means 'what a stupid thing to do'.

<sup>4</sup> The pan-Mayan movement is not a politicised movement per se, but has political goals. For the purpose of this thesis, the expression pan-Mayan movement refers to a social movement representing Mayan groups across Guatemala, rather than all Central American Mayan groups (though the movement has established contacts to indigenous movements in Mexico and Honduras). For further elaboration, refer to Chapter 4.

## 1.5 Guatemala: Map and Basic Statistics



CIA World Fact Book 2006

<b>Size:</b>	108,430 sq km
<b>Population:</b>	12.5 million
<b>Urban population:</b>	46.3 per cent
<b>Life expectancy:</b>	67.3 years
<b>Government type:</b>	Constitutional democratic republic
<b>Official language:</b>	Spanish
<b>Religions:</b>	Roman Catholic, Protestant, Traditional Mayan Beliefs
<b>GDP per capita:</b>	4,148 \$
<b>Human Development Index Ranking:</b>	117 (of 156)
<b>Population income below poverty line:</b>	\$1 a day: 16.0 per cent \$ 2 a day: 37.4 per cent The CIA World Fact Book suggests that some 75 per cent of the population live below the poverty line.
<b>Adult literacy:</b>	69.1 per cent
<b>Percentage of undernourished people:</b>	24.0 per cent
<b>Major sources of revenue:</b>	Agriculture (Coffee, Sugar, Bananas, etc.)

Source: UN Human Development Index 2005; CIA World Fact Book 2006, Nohlen: Lexikon Dritte Welt (2002).

## Chapter 2: Methodological considerations and fieldwork design

### 2. 1 Approach

The purpose of the study is to explore the relation between news media - seen as a social and cultural phenomenon - and identity formation in post-conflict environments. One of my assumptions is that by highlighting media influence, new insights can be gained into necessities of conflict resolution in a post-conflict environment from a human needs perspective. In order to obtain empirical evidence to test my hypotheses, I chose to examine Guatemala as a ‘case study’.

Yin defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (1994: 13). By aiming to understand how Mayans and Ladinos read the Guatemalan print media, and which conclusions they are inferring from their findings, I explored the relation between the news media and Mayan identity formation, and how and if Mayan cultural needs are addressed in the Guatemalan daily print media.

Having a strong personal interest in Latin American affairs, I chose to conduct my study on Guatemala because its 36 years of civil war had a clear ending point in the not too distant past. Crucially, and rather surprisingly to long-term observers of the country, the signing of the 1996 peace agreement was preceded by the Agreement on the Rights and Identity of Indigenous People. The agreement had a strong cultural focus and clearly outlined a number of suggestions - some of which are related to the media - to change this situation. This provided me with a clear indication emphasising the cultural needs of the Mayans and thus the relevance of my discussion, on which I am building with my hypotheses.

Yet an attempt to analyse a violent conflict, particularly in a country marked by colonialism and a racist ideology such as Guatemala, can easily end up as a political manifest against the injustice imposed on marginalized groups throughout the past 500 years. While I certainly do not wish to understate this discrimination, which, in a moderated form, continues to take place in present-day Guatemala, I aim to overcome this challenge by outlining a potential obstacle from or solution to the peace process that will impact the country’s *future*, thereby taking into account Watanabe’s warning

that "a preoccupation with the injustices of history provides little sense of the future beyond repudiating the present that the past has spawned" (1994: 3). By addressing the issue of post-conflict communication from the viewpoint of its relevance for the ritual order, I hope to aid understanding of this difficult, broad conception and potentially address a research gap pointed out by Spitulnik (among others), who writes that "unfortunately, this conceptualisation by media as vehicles of culture, and as modes of imagining and imaging communities has had limited empirical application to date" (1993: 295).

As I aimed not aiming to *measure*, but to *understand* the Guatemalan news media in their wider context, I took a *qualitative* approach to the study. Jensen points out that whereas "quantitative analysis would focus on the concrete, delimited *products* of the media's meaning production, qualitative approaches examine meaning production as a *process* which is contextualised and inextricably integrated with wider social and cultural practices" (sic, 1991:4). My data was collected through *semi-structured interviews*, either on an *in-depth* individual basis, or in *focus groups*.

In qualitative social science research, sources used can have two basic functions: They can either provide information on 'facts of matter', or they can be used as 'testimony of somebody's opinions and way of thinking'<sup>5</sup> (Dahl 1973: 38). The information I tried to gather in Guatemala was on how far the cultural needs of identity and recognition are addressed by the Guatemalan media, and what possible effects this could have on conflict resolution efforts in the country. I thus used my sources for both these functions, letting the type of information I required determine the method applied.

The main part of my data was collected during my field study from 31 December 2005 until 10 March 2006<sup>6</sup>. The length of my stay therefore crucially determined the amount of data I was able to collect, and thus restrained the number of interviews conducted. Another factor limiting the quantity of the data collected were security concerns in a country that, although opening up to tourism, is still

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<sup>5</sup> While Farr makes essentially the same point, he defines qualitative interviewing more broadly by pointing out it is "essentially a technique or method for establishing or discovering that there are perspectives or viewpoints on events other than those of the person initiating the interview" (in Gaskell, 2000: 38).

<sup>6</sup> I had previously visited Guatemala to undertake some preliminary research in June and July 2005, and was able to draw on some of the contacts established during that stay for my Master Thesis.

unacquainted with unaccompanied Western female travellers and is classified as the most violent country in Central America. Thirdly, much of my time was spent waiting for interviewees who either did not turn up at all, or who rearranged appointments on multiple occasions, significantly reducing the number of interviews I was able to conduct within the given timeframe.

Regarding facts of matter, I aimed to gather information on the political economy of the Guatemalan media-landscape and the socio-political situation of Mayans in present-day Guatemala. As far as available, I consulted documents, articles and books, but due to the lack of documentation on the country, I largely relied on *qualitative in-depth interviews* with experts in the field. This included formal interviews, as well as a number of informal conversations and e-mail exchanges both in Oslo and Guatemala (in addition to daily conversations with the staff of media NGO FUPEDDES during my five weeks of volunteer work with the organization). The experts were chosen according to the professional merit they would bring to the study, and worked in a research, NGO, or media environment or represented the Guatemalan government. All individuals and organisations chosen for both in-depth interviews and reception studies purposefully reflect all aspects of the political spectrum as well as both ethnic groups (see Appendix No.1).

I recorded interviews with 9 persons, lasting between 30 minutes and one hour, taking place in Guatemala City, Quetzaltenango, and La Antigua Guatemala. The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, meaning that they revolved around predefined issues, such as the pan-Mayan movement, the landscape of the Guatemalan media or Mayan identity. I tailored the questions for each particular interview, and would ask follow-up questions whenever new issues arose. Many of the participants were consulted both in term of facts of matter and regarding their own opinion.

Though I had to consider the content of the Guatemalan print media for my analysis, I chose not to employ the techniques of *content* or *discourse analysis* on the news articles, as I felt that I would always view issues from an outside perspective. I am not in a position to judge how a Guatemalan citizen - particularly one of Mayan origin - would read and interpret news items, as I am lacking what Schröder et al deem the 'historical code' necessary for understanding the cultural context (2003:122). However, this insider viewpoint is crucial to understanding how the news media work

in shaping and reshaping identity. I have therefore opted for an ethnographic approach, interested in understanding the point of view of Guatemalan Mayas and Ladinos, drawing on a technique suggested by Burawoy, which is to improve one's understanding of an alien cultural context through dialogue with the natives (1991).

Consequently I chose the approach of *reception analysis* to study how Ladinos and Mayans interpret the Guatemalan news media. Interpretation and opinion of cultural insiders stand at the core of this approach, where audiences are seen as active producers of meaning, rather than the mere consumers of media meaning. Media users are seen to decode media texts in ways which are related to their social and cultural circumstances and the ways that they individually experience those circumstances (Schrøder et al, 2003). Using *in-depth interviews* and *focus group interviews* as means of uncovering the meanings which readers generate for media content, while focusing on the audience's 'situatedness' within a particular socio-historical context, means that the researcher examines issues far beyond the media text itself (Underwood, 2003). I chose to conduct my study on the basis of focus groups, as I felt it would be useful to cover the process of meaning making through the discussion among participants (Schrøder et al, 2003:125).

Reception research was first introduced by the British cultural school. Hall (1973) and Morley draw on the idea of a 'preferred reading', "signifying mechanisms which promote certain meanings; even one privileged meaning, and suppress others" (Morley, 1992:21). This leads to an epistemological problem, as Schrøder et al point out:

Even if there were such a thing as a preferred reading coming from 'within the text' how can we know it? Epistemologically, the attempt to discover one privileged meaning is bound to fail, for the simple reason that not even the most skilled textual analysts can arrive at a characterization of a media text without reading it. Consequently, any property ascribed to the text is always unavoidably a property of the analyst's reading of that text, and therefore a product of the analyst's interpretative repertoire, which are marginally or substantially divergent from all other readings (2003: 132).

Yet Jensen, on whose notion of super themes I will draw for this thesis, considers the reception process as a rather more active process of sense-making. By pointing to the number of media readings different from those anticipated by media researchers, Jensen underlines the polysemy of media discourses, "the existence of quite different interpretative strategies that are applied to the same discourse by different audiences"

(1991:138). Thus, “such interpretative communities... relying on specific contextualized frames of cognitive and affective understanding, appear to crisscross, to a degree, standard socioeconomic audience categories” (Jensen, 1991:138). At the same time, the readings are likely to be shared among groups of similar cultural backgrounds (Schrøder et al, 2003:125).

## **2.2 Super themes and the interpretation of news**

‘Super themes’ are an analytical concept within reception research developed by Jensen (1991). Described as a model that can bridge the gap between the social semiotic and the cognitive approach to reception by Schrøder et al (2003: 134), Jensen conceptualises super themes as “interpretative procedures which are employed by the audience for reconstruction of meaning in the news genre, ...a proposition entailed by a set of propositions summing up a news story (or another text) from the recipients perspective” (1991: 144). Jensen suggests that they thus resemble the psychological schemata found by other studies of news. Höjjer describes schemas as:

... complex types of cognitive structures representing generic social experiences and cultural knowledge. They contain common and characteristic features of similar phenomena, for example similar objects, events, situations, and discourses... Cognitive schemas exist in the minds of individual subjects as psychic structure, but they are linked to the socio-cultural and historical realities. Schemas are developed from daily life experiences which in their turn reflect socio-cultural circumstances at a certain point in history (1992: 287-289)

Super themes “represent an example of how qualitative research, starting from the respondents’ conceptual categories, may identify certain general processes which are constitutive of mass communication” they are “useful mechanisms for understanding news content because they establish a meaningful relationship between the world of politics and the world of everyday life” (Jensen, 1991: 144-145). In-depth studies of super-themes can thus identify fundamental conflicts in society, and assess how far the news media “provide a social resource in the form of politically applicable information” and consequently “hold implications for politics and policy” (Jensen, 1991: 145).

Jensen suggests separation between argumentation and narratives for analytical purposes. Respondents’ discourses are also referred to as narratives. As participants tell a story to make a point, “[t]he distribution of major themes and issues onto



different discursive positions and narrative sequences, thus, allows for an understanding of the dynamic, processual nature of meaning as it emerges in research discourses” (Jensen, 1995:137). Jensen proposes that for research employing interviewing, “narrative models also have heuristic value by identifying several fundamental categories of discursive universe” (1995:137).

Argumentation draws on a “relatively fixed repertoire of strategies combining premises and conclusions, assertions and substantiations (1995: 135). Each step may be founded on presuppositions or implicit premises (Leech and Culler in Jensen, 1995:135). Thus, “tracing each of these elements in a sample text suggests how particular premises and ideas underlying and structuring an argument can be identified” (Jensen, 1995: 135).

In this thesis, I consequently aim to answer the following questions:

- How are the three different identities (indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan) represented by the Guatemalan press?
- What type of identity is being promoted by this press coverage?
- How does this type of identity affect the addressal of cultural needs in Guatemala?

### **2.3 Methods and focus groups used in Guatemala**

Though my study is located within the field of reception research, due to my position as a cultural outsider I chose not to draw on specific articles. Instead I employed an ethnographic underpinning to reception research by interviewing individuals and focus groups on their perception of the Mayan identity in the Guatemalan news media, focusing on the press, and asking the groups to suggest examples of stories to illustrate their points. To stimulate discussion among the focus groups, I also introduced eight example issues of the four biggest national daily Guatemalan newspapers. This approach stands true to the traditional intersection between reception research and ethnographic studies (Schröder et al, 2003).

Working with print media in a country that has an illiteracy rate of 31,8 percent, and where as little as 20 percent of the population is educated beyond primary school level, leads to obvious concerns regarding the validity of my study (Adams & Bastos: 2003). I chose to focus on the print media mainly for practical concerns, as arranging focus groups in locations which have the technical possibility to present radio or TV programmes would have been considerably more difficult. In addition, as will be

elaborated in Chapter 5, there are few news programmes on radio. Televisions are still prohibitively expensive for many city dwellers, and even more so for rural inhabitants, who are not all in a position to receive electricity and TV signals.

A much discussed point regarding indigenous Guatemalan media are the so-called community radios, small radio stations run by community members, often volunteers. These stations are certainly an interesting feature in the Guatemalan media landscape, as some broadcast part of their programmes in indigenous languages, but I was more interested in investigating Mayan representation in the mainstream news media. In addition as many of these stations are financed by various churches, they provide very little news output, not to mention the fact that I do not speak any Mayan language, as thus would have to rely completely on translations of the programmes.

Newspapers on the other hand provided the distinct advantage that I could read all the articles using my relatively fluent Spanish, and they are easy to transport and present to participants. Although not reaching to all rural areas, the newspapers are for sale in any town throughout Guatemala. This does not mean that they are available to everybody (who can read and does not live in a remote place) though, as the cost of a daily newspaper at around 2,50 NOK (2,50 Quetzales), is many cases prohibitively high, considering that large numbers of families still survive on about 10 NOK per day. It is for these reasons that newspapers are regarded the medium for educated people with a steady income.

The examples issues were chosen at random upon my arrival in Guatemala and cover a period of eight days in January, yet I insured that each paper was represented with one Sunday and one week-day edition, and that each day chosen was represented both by a tabloid and a more serious newspaper (broadsheet). The newspapers selected represent four of the five biggest daily national papers in Guatemala, and the only four publications which are distributed throughout the country<sup>7</sup>. The dates and papers chosen were as following (for a more in-depth description refer to chapter 5):

***Al Dia*** (tabloid): Sun 8 January 2006 & Thur 12 January 2006

***Nuestro Diario*** (tabloid): Fri 13 January 2006 & Sun 15 January 2006

***Prensa Libre*** (mid-market/broadsheet): Fri 13 January 2006 & Sun 15 January 2006

***Siglo Veintiuno*** (broadsheet): Sun 8 January 2006 & Thur 12 January 2006

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<sup>7</sup> Another major daily paper, *El Periodico*, had stopped delivery to Quetzaltenango in January 2006.

By beginning the sample with 8 January I tried to avoid the effects of the Christmas holidays, which in many places lasted until the 6 January. I also found it interesting to see how the stories develop and therefore included the editions of two consecutive days, albeit of different newspapers. Although it would have been interesting to show how stories develop in the same publication, I tried to avoid bringing too many newspapers into the groups to avoid distracting the participants unnecessarily and to keep my luggage to a manageable size<sup>8</sup>. I had taken photocopies of articles in the selected editions that I found particularly interesting in relation to the topic, and provided them to each member of the group should somebody refer to one of the articles selected.

Regarding the focus groups, all possible effort was undertaken to ensure a wide spectrum of participants. As I was drawing on three student groups for practical reasons, I chose to conduct the interviews in three different universities, in order to reflect more of the variety within Guatemalan society. Though all students interviewed were in the privileged position of having the opportunity to attend university education, the spectrum of universities ranks from a Western standard privately run and extremely modern campus attended by young Guatemalan elites in the capital, other ventures which had a lot less funding at their disposition, and were therefore attended by people with a more moderate background, to a focus group consisting mainly of students and former students who were only able to receive higher education on the base of a full scholarship, granted to them for the very reason of their indigenous, poor and rural background. Though three of the five focus groups consisted of students only, two of the groups were made up of people already working in professional life, even though Focus Group 1 included a number of people still attending university education.

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<sup>8</sup> This was mainly due to the fact that I was continuously travelling throughout the country and due to security concerns while working in Guatemala City.

**Fig 2.1 Overview of the focus groups interviewed for this study:**

Focus group	Number of participants	Age	Males	Females	Non-indigenous	Maya	Rural	City	University level
1	7	21-29	4	3	2	5	6	1	6
2	6	18-36	4	2	5	1	3	3	6
3	4	20-23	-	4	4	-	1	3	4
4	4	20-21	3	1	4	-	-	4	4
5	6	32-57	4	2	3	3	2	4	5
TOTAL:	27	18-57 (average = 27,6)	15	12	18	9	13	14	25

These figures point to a clear bias in terms of education. All but two of the participants either have a university degree or were in higher education when my research was conducted. These people constitute the elite in a country where only about 3 per cent of the population<sup>9</sup> has the chance to ever attend university. Yet an obvious imperative of conducting research on media is the fact that the participants actually need to be consumers of the medium in question. As discussed earlier, in the case of Guatemala this inevitably means members having received more education than many of the population, though it is clear that one does not have to be in higher education in order to be able to read a newspaper.

Large part of my choice were ultimately due to practical concerns of organising the focus groups, as all the organisations willing to collaborate dealt almost exclusively with people at university level. Yet, educated elites are often seen to be opinion leaders, and in a position of more relative power than those of a lower social status. It is beyond the scope of my study to discuss the advantages of the top-down or bottom-up approaches to power and change within society, yet the in the case of Guatemala, people with a university education certainly are in a position of influence. I thus still view my study as relevant, be it only in terms of media influence on the educated elites.

Another positive side-effect of this choice is that my status as a Master student from a European university invoked some degree of respect among the participants, as they were familiar with the workings of higher educations. Thus some of my concerns regarding working not only as a cultural outsider, but as a young European female researcher with focus groups including a large proportion of men marked by an up-

<sup>9</sup> Figure provided in interview with Marisol de Alecia, 02.02.2006.

bringing in the Latin American culture were not justified. In general the focus groups collaborated extremely well, as they themselves found my topic of research interesting and relevant.

A main concern is the considerable absence of Mayans among the total number of participants, as well as the absence of a group consisting solely of Mayans. This is due to two major reasons: First, the general lack of Mayans accessible for this study. With Guatemala's high illiteracy rates, which are in clear correlation to rural indigenous areas, few Mayans are in a position to receive higher education, or even education that goes beyond primary school level, resulting in a low level of newspaper consumption among large parts of the indigenous population. As discussed above, the cost of newspapers is many cases prohibitively high for significant parts of the indigenous population. Furthermore, I had to find a way of accessing the focus groups, and Mayans are severely underrepresented at a institutionalised level – shown for example by the fact, that the two universities in the capital simply had no indigenous students they could ask to participate.

Second, although I had arranged two focus groups with solely Mayan participants in November 2005, in practice, none of them could not be carried out as in one case, appointments were continuously cancelled, and in the other, despite my clear specifications, only two participants materialized on the day, invalidating the concept of a focus group for my research purposes.

A criticism often voiced towards the institutional culture in Guatemala is its strong centralism, with all of its major media outlets, universities, research institutions etc. based in the capital, with its mainly ladino culture, under representing the *departamientos*, the rest of the country, in particular the large rural<sup>10</sup> and predominantly indigenous areas. I tried to avoid falling into this trap by conducting three of my focus group interviews in Quetzaltenango, which though - for practical purposes - is a relatively large city of around 130,000 inhabitants, is situated within the Guatemalan highlands, surrounded by rural indigenous communities, and comprised almost entirely of citizens with indigenous ancestors, though many now consider themselves to be Ladinos (Grandin: 2000). Due to its location, many of the students attending the local universities have a more rural or small town background.

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<sup>10</sup> According to World Bank figures, Guatemala had a rural population of 56 per cent in 2004.

In a country with a prevailing ‘macho’ culture, gender appears to be another point to consider. Figures of domestic violence, murders of women (femicides) and rape are towering (Grais-Targow: 2004). I was concerned that in these environments, the opinion of a man might be seen to be counting for ‘more’, thus intimidating the free expression of opinion by some of the female participants. Additionally, despite my prior specifications to the universities, two of the research groups had considerably more male than female participants. Yet, I feel that I was able to address some of the concerns regarding the representation of female opinion by including a group that consisted only of female participants.

With an average age of 27,6 years most my participants are of ‘student age’. I was thus concentrating on media influence among young people, although, I decided to include Focus Group 5 made up entirely of professionals outside the student age bracket, as I found it interesting to see how important age was for the attitudes of the participants. Focus Group1, which also comprised student participants, can thus be seen as a fusion between the two, as its participants were not only a little older than the student groups, but were already working as professionals.

The inferences made from the study thus only hold true for a segment of the highly educated, relatively young and mainly non-indigenous part of the Guatemalan population. The differences these socio-cultural characteristics presented to their outlook on the Guatemalan media coverage are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, which deals with the five focus groups.

In summary, I hope that my study holds true to the criteria set by Giorgi:

The chief point to be remembered with this type of research is not so much whether another position with respect to the data could be adopted... but whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it (in Schröder et al, 2003: 170).

## **2.4 My work with FUPEDS and the side-effects of my field work**

During the first five weeks of my stay in Guatemala, I was working with media NGO FUPEDS, based in Quetzaltenango. FUPEDS, an organisation dedicated to ‘Journalism for Development, Democracy and Peace’ is providing journalism education to indigenous people. Goals include the spread of community media in Mayan languages, and a broader representation of Mayan goals and cultural values in the Guatemalan media landscape. Through daily conversations with the FUPEDS

staff<sup>11</sup>, the majority of whom are either trained journalists or still receiving journalism training, I got a clearer picture of the Guatemala news media, which is particularly helpful, as there is little data available.

In January 2006 FUPEDDES, as part of their new 'Education for Peace' programme, began a series of conferences in indigenous communities in the Quetzaltenango area, addressing their everyday 'conflicts' or problems with violent consequences. I was able to attend eight of these conferences, dealing with issues such as self-esteem, domestic violence, morals and values, violent youth groups, and emigration. Though not directly related to Mayan representation in the Guatemalan media, this provided me with a clearer understanding of some of the problems these indigenous communities are facing, and enabled me to converse with a great number of Mayans, many of whom were from very remote areas. Although my study is not based within the anthropological field, much of the debate surrounding the slippery concept of 'identity' draws on anthropological thought, and though I would not go as far as to claim that my observations could be used as valid data, making use of the different methods of 'participant observation' gave me a clearer idea of what to look for, thus serving as an inspiration for future questions in my research. This was supported by my conversations with the two psychologists working with the groups on the lack of Mayan self-esteem and the consequences for Mayan identity.

Spending a total of four months in the country<sup>12</sup> gave me the chance to gain some first-hand experience regarding the topic I was working with. As I travelled back and forth throughout the country using public transportation, I used to the opportunity to speak to a great variety of Guatemalans. Being a female foreigner gave me the distinct advantage that very few people would perceive me as threatening, thus enabling me to speak to both male and female indigenous farm workers, as well as people belonging to Guatemala's 'white' elite. I was positively surprised by and grateful for the amount of hospitality and curiosity from my conversation partners, to whom I and my culture was just as 'exotic' as theirs was to me. I was told many times that my position as a foreigner, alien to the Guatemalan system meant that particularly

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<sup>11</sup> In spring 2006 FUPEDDES employed between 15 and 20 people, most of whom were trained journalists.

<sup>12</sup> I had spent 6 weeks in Guatemala in June and July 2005, conducting preliminary research and working as a freelance journalist

indigenous people from a rural background would not be as intimidated by my as they would have been by a Guatemalan Ladino, particularly as my Spanish does not sound as fluent as that of a natural speaker. I had the impression that many of my acquaintances could relate to my position of being a ‘cultural alien’, as there are still many Mayans who do not speak more than rudimentary Spanish, or hardly any Spanish at all<sup>13</sup>, and who, due to a lack of cultural codes used in Guatemalan enterprises, also had difficulties in dealing with every-day situations such as paying their bus fare.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 1994 figures suggest that 29.49 of Guatemala’s indigenous population does not speak Spanish (INE National Census, in Adams & Bastos, 2003:79).

<sup>14</sup> Yet, in general I was treated considerably more understanding and cordial



## Chapter 3: Outlining Human Needs Theory

The chapter outlines the theoretical groundings of the discussion by giving a brief introduction to human needs theory, followed by a closer definition of the cultural needs of recognition and identity. The formation of collective identities is seen in the light of Castell's theory on identity formation, which draws on a group's relative power position. As will be explored in Chapter 4, the news media are closely linked to the formation of collective identities, which is an essential concept when attempting conflict resolution in the cultural sphere.

### 3.1 Conflict resolution as overcoming basic needs

A conflict is "a social situation in which a minimum of two actors strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources", and can be enacted by both violent and non-violent means (Wallensteen, 2002: 16). Following a comprehensive tradition of conflict resolution, Miall, Ramsbothan and Woodhouse suggest that to resolve conflict "implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed, and resolved. This implies that behavior is no longer violent, attitudes are no longer hostile, and the structure of the conflict has been changed" (1999: 21). One technique for conflict resolution suggested by the scholars is to translate conflicting positions and values into underlying basic needs (1999: 9).

This idea draws on the human needs view of conflict resolution which includes addressing the underlying needs that led to the conflict in the first place. The causal basis of conflict is seen as the denial of basic irreplaceable needs which must be identified and answered in any successful attempt at conflict resolution<sup>15</sup> (Rubenstein: 2001). Drawing originally on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of basic human needs<sup>16</sup>, the needs theory argues that "in the long term, unmet psycho-political and socio-economic needs lead to dysfunctional cognitive and behavioral patterns", that is, violent conflict (Azar, 1990: 2).

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<sup>15</sup> For an extensive critique of the human needs theory, refer to Rubenstein (2001).

<sup>16</sup> In his hierarchy of human needs, Maslow proposes five levels of human needs: physiological needs, safety, acceptance, esteem and the need for self-actualisation. More basic needs – i.e. physiological needs – must be satisfied before higher level needs can arise (Baron, 1989: 379-380).

Though the basic needs are conceptualized in slightly different terms by various proponents of the theory, this paper will draw on Edward Azar's distinction between three principal needs: *acceptance* or *cultural needs* such as recognition and identity; *access* or *political needs* such as effective participation in political, market and decision-making institutions, and *security* or *economic needs* such as physical security, nutrition and housing (1990: 7-9; for others see Burton: 1990; Coser in Wallensteen, 2002: 39). As discussed earlier, while much of the literature on conflict resolution focuses on the two latter needs, this thesis is concerned with the adressal of cultural needs.

### **3.2 Cultural Needs**

Cultural needs appear to be at the core of conflict dynamics. Azar proposes that individuals strive to fulfil their human need for acceptance through the formation of identity groups (1990). While there is no reason to believe that inter-group differentiation inevitably leads to conflict, in their social identity theory Tajfel & Turner suggest that when a group's action for positive distinctiveness is frustrated, impeded or in any way actively prevented by an outgroup, this will promote overt conflict and hostility between the groups (1986: 23). Østby points out that this may be so even in the absence of incompatible group interests (2003: 24). In addition, Azar underscores that in many cases, "deprivation of physical needs and denial of access are rooted in the refusal to recognize or accept the communal identity of other groups" (1990: 9). Wallensteen makes a similar point when he outlines the close connection between material and cultural needs:

If a person cannot use his or her own language to pursue a particular agreement with official authorities, this person is at a distinct disadvantage against those who commended, and thus the person is more likely not to receive a fair share of, say, social services, or business use (2002: 176).

The cultural needs of identity and recognition are thus paramount on two levels: Being basic human needs makes them irreplaceable, yet they also impact on other basic human needs – such as political and economic ones.

Before exploring the relevance of cultural needs, here seen to encompass the ideas of recognition and identity, these ambiguous but principal terms require a definition.

### 3.3 Recognition

*Recognition* means to be perceived as equally valuable in society. The concept is closely linked to the ideas of respect and dignity; Hannah Ahrendt calls it ‘the right to have rights’ (1986). Recognition can be seen as recognition of the intrinsic worth of all human beings; but also as recognition of and respect for the differences of disempowered groups (Kabeer, 2005: 4). In a society where the main differences are seen to be along cultural lines, recognition of the minority group – here seen in terms of relative powerlessness, not numbers - must therefore mean recognition of the minority culture.

As regards the needs for recognition, my thesis thus draws on the viewpoint of Particularity, which stands in contrast to the concept of Universalism. In state policy, Particularity calls for *explicit* recognition of the cultural identities of all citizens, given in the form of laws that differentiate members of one group from another. Kymlicka distinguishes between three different types of group-differentiated rights: ‘polyethnic rights’, ‘special representation rights’, and ‘self-government rights’ (1995). “Whereas polyethnic rights concern the content of specific policies, self-government and special representation rights aim at giving groups the means to influence policies<sup>17</sup>” (Bendiksby, 1999: 11).

As the thesis is concerned with recognition, I will focus on polyethnic rights, which are “intended to help ethnic groups and religious minorities express their cultural particularity and pride without hampering their success in the economic and political institutions of the dominant society” (Kymlicka, 1995: 31). They function as guarantees for ethnic groups against various forms of discrimination, and aim to lessen the impact of assimilation. Their purpose is to facilitate integration into, not autonomy from, the dominant culture’s institutions (Doppelt in Bendiksby, 1999:11).

In contrast, universalism requires state neutrality regarding the particular cultural identities of its citizens. For proponents of this approach, it goes against the classic liberal idea of non-discrimination if the state identifies, protects or promotes any particular ethnic or cultural identity, as particularists suggest. The concept

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<sup>17</sup> Special representation rights are rights aimed at guaranteeing a reflection of the population’s diversity within political institutions, while self-determination rights “typically take the form of devolving political power to a political unit substantially controlled by the members of the national minority, and substantially corresponding to their homeland or territory” (Kymlicka: 1995:30).

assumes that cultures are protected indirectly through guarantees for fundamental individual rights. However, critics of universalism argue that

In the pursuit of a single, universal set of principles to govern the public realm, complex difference is necessarily repressed, paradoxically creating dichotomy instead of unity... The result, with respect to particular ethnic group identities, is that members of minority ethnic groups are either excluded from citizenship or included only to the extent to which they are able to repress the particularity of their ethnic identity (Squires, 2002: 235).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go deeper into the normative discussion of fruitfulness of each of the concepts<sup>18</sup>. In this discussion recognition is equivalent to being perceived as an equally valuable member of society. Rights for recognition are seen as polyethnic rights, intended to help minorities express their cultural particularity without hampering their success in the dominant society. The lack of these rights creates the unfulfilled human need for recognition.

### **3.4 Identity**

For leading identity theoretician Manuel Castells, *identity* is “people’s source of meaning and experience”, based on “a cultural attribute or related set of cultural attributes that is/are giving priority over other sources of meaning” (1997: 6). Meaning is seen as “the symbolic identification by a social actor of his/her actions” (1997: 7). Ferguson argues that identity, as the local belief system, “must be understood in order to understand how individual persons take the message and act on it, make sense of it, live with it, resist it, and recover from it” (2003: 20). As Fenton and May stress, these belief systems are based on self-perception, conceiving of identity as descent and culture communities

...which are, at least in part, distinctive because they see themselves, or are seen by others, as sharing ancestry and cultural heritage in ways that distinguish them from other groups... The claim to the sense of ‘sharedness’ is at least as important as the foundations for the claim (2002: 2).

It is common to distinguish between personal and collective identity, though the two levels of analysis are integrally and reciprocally related to each other. Depending on the context, most people have multiple affiliations and identities – some locally based,

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<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth discussion on the topic in relation to Guatemala, see Bendiksbj (1999). Bendiksbj makes the excellent point that polyethnic rights can be interpreted as general and fundamental individual rights, or as derivative of these, thus making them an implied demand by both proponents of universalism and particularity (1999).

some family based, some age or class based, and some culturally and ethnically differentiated (Smith, 2001: 18). While personal identity draws on characteristics, experiences, perceptions and preferences, collective identity can stem from a variety of different sources such as a perceived common history, geography, productive and reproductive institutions, collective memory, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, and sexuality (Castells, 1997: 7, Kwame, 2005:22). Collective identities are the notions which “provide clues of norms or models, which play a role in shaping our plans of life. Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their projects, and in telling their life stories” (Kwame, 2005: 22).

Both personal and collective identity play a role in what Kwame terms the *stories of the self*. Part of the function of collective identities is to structure possible narratives of the individual self. “It is not just that, say, gender identities give shape to one's life; it is also that ethnic and national identities put a personal narrative into a larger narrative” (2005: 22-23). But unlike personal identities,

...only collective identities have scripts, and only they count as what Ian Hacking meant by 'kinds of person'. There is a logical category, but no social category of the witty, or the clever, or the charming, or the greedy. People who share these properties do not constitute a social group. In the relevant sense, they are not a kind of person (Kwame, 2005: 23).

Collective identities are thus the social linkages that create the *possibility* that a national or ethnic community with a sense of group will emerge (Kovacs, 2004: 30).

Like individual identity, collective identity is fluid and dynamic, as contemporary identities are seen to be formed throughout our lives and perceived to be mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive and subject to change and innovation, but social and other-related<sup>19</sup> (Kellner, 1995: 231, Herzfeld, 2001: 305; Lewis: 2005: 370). As identities are deeply connected to the making of a personality, “to abandon involuntarily who I authentically am is to commit a kind of spiritual suicide” (Goldstein & Rayner, 1994: 368).

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<sup>19</sup> Unlike pre-modern world identities, which are seen as functions of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths providing orientation and rigorously circumscribing the realm of thought and behaviour, thus reflecting a pre-eminent collectivity or tribal consciousness. (Lewis: 2005: 370)

### 3.5 The formation of collective identities

For the purpose of this thesis, I am drawing on Manuel Castells, who proposes three different origins of collective identity formation<sup>20</sup> (1997). As identities are seen as dynamic concepts, this process can adapt according to the circumstances, and move in sequences from one to the other.

The *legitimizing identity* is an undifferentiated, normalising identity introduced by dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalise their domination vis à vis social actors. While legitimising identity produces civil society, it does so in manner which prolongs the dynamics of the state and dominant actors, as it acts within the existing system. It thus reproduces “albeit sometimes in a conflictive manner, the identity that rationalises the sources of structural domination” (1997: 8).

*Resistance identities* are generated by those actors that are in positions devalued or stigmatised by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those dominating the institutions of society, leading to “the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded” (1997: 9). Thus, it can be argued that resistance identities stem from the frustration of the lack of recognition experienced by the marginalised group.

*Project identities* are created when social actors build a new identity that redefines their position in society, and by doing so, seek the transformation of the overall structure. Project identity supports the formation of a common identity on a national basis. This type of collective identity supports the formation of a common identity, helping to raise the self-esteem and overcome the security dilemma often experienced by minority groups or groups with a minority status. Consequently, these groups no longer have the incentive to take up arms to defend themselves from a real or perceived threat to their safety (Kaufmann, 2001). Celebrating otherness, as suggested by Rob Manoff, is one such way of increasing the self-esteem of marginalized groups (1999). The acknowledgement of their cultural individuality will lead to an appreciation of the equal value of all identities, and is therefore of vital importance.

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<sup>20</sup> Castells sees identity formation always in relation to power. Yet Castells uses these three concepts in relation to the new information network, while dismissing ethnicity as less important in the face of globalisation, I will nonetheless use the concept for the Guatemalan Mayans, as ethnicity is still a decisive factor in Guatemalan society. For the limited purpose of this Master thesis, I am not able to take the globalisation debate into account.

### 3.6 Ethnic identity

While ethnic identities are commonly interpreted within three lines of reasoning<sup>21</sup>, there is strong consent among researchers on Guatemala to view the identity of the different ethnic groups from a constructivist perspective, meaning that race and ethnicity are not neutral categories, their boundaries are not fixed, nor is their membership uncontested, such as suggested by Bulmer and Solomos:

People are socially defined as belonging to particular ethnic or racial groups, either in terms of definitions employed by others, or definitions which members of particular ethnic groups employ themselves. They are ideological entities, made and changed in struggle. They are discursive formations, signaling a language through which differences [that] are accorded social significance may be named and explained. (1998: 822).

The concept *ethnicity* therefore draws on the reproduction of an identity, rather than biology or class - race and ethnic groups, like nations, are imagined communities<sup>22</sup>. 'Being Maya' or 'Being Ladino' is determined according to the culture the person or group in question chooses to orientate herself towards: a variety of Mayan cultures for Mayans, or Hispanic and Western cultures for Ladinos<sup>23</sup> (Adams: 1995b).

### 3.7 Identity in relation to 'the Other': Recognition and Identity

We know of no people without names, no languages or cultures in which some manner of distinction between self and other, we and they, are not made... Self-knowledge – always a construction no matter how much it feels like a discovery – is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others (Calhoun: 1994: 9-10).

Identity is both inherently social and other-related, as one will not only have to compare oneself to others in order to know what separates one from the rest, but this otherness will also have to receive recognition by others if one should be able to live one's identity. Lewis sums up: "The notion of 'who I am' is only conceivable in relation to other humans and the culture in which the individual functions" (2005: 370). Hegel therefore sees identities as constructed diagonally through a process of

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<sup>21</sup> Crawford Young (1993) divided accounts of ethnic identity into the three broad theoretical approaches of *primordialism*, *instrumentalism* and *constructivism*.

<sup>22</sup> Refer to Anderson (1993) for the concept of 'nation as an imagined community'.

<sup>23</sup> These definitions correspond to the historical development of the term Ladino, as will be discussed later on.

mutual recognition, and as if one's identity depended on recognition from others combined with self-validation of this recognition ( in Kellner, 1995: 231).

Nancy Fraser points out that according to this model "recognition from others is the vast essential to the development of the sense of self. To be denied recognition or to be misrecognised is to suffer both a distortion of one's relation to oneself and an injury to one's identity" (2005: 245). Yet, she underlines the institutionalized relation of social inequalities and stresses that identity cannot replace recognition when seen as enabling one to be a full member of society.

To be misrecognised, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in other's attitudes, beliefs or representation. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (2005: 247).

Thus, while recognition will have to encompass identity, it should not stop at that. Summarizing the arguments and translating the concepts for the purposes of conflict resolution, the need for identity and recognition shall therefore be defined in the following terms: The need for identity is the urge for *being what I am*, for being able to construct meaning in one's way of meaning-making. The need for recognition is seen as the need for attaining the status of a full and equal partner in society. Combined, the needs of recognition and identity describe *the need for non-discrimination for reasons of who I am* (Wallensteen, 2002: 176).

Both legitimatising and resistance identity carry inherent conflictual potential – one by normalising the domination of the powerful, the other by excluding the dominant group, consequently furthering chasms in society – and can thus not be seen to address cultural needs in a manner that is fruitful for comprehensive conflict resolution. Project identity on the other hand provides the potential to address the needs of identity and recognition the construction of a new all-inclusive identity. One way to address these cultural needs rests in the cultural sphere of society – and consequently society's news media.



## Chapter 4: News media and the addressal of collective identities

This chapter outlines how the media, as transmitters of culture, can shape the development of a collective identity, thus having the potential to address underlying cultural needs of identity and recognition.

### 4.1 James Carey and Mass Media's twofold role in society

For the purposes of comprehensive conflict resolution, Mayan collective identity and the formation of a new Guatemalan identity which reflects and recognises this Mayan identity, is an issue that will have to be addressed within the Guatemalan society.

Drawing on a definition by Rosengreen, *societies* are “structured primarily by a central element in the ideational, cultural system: its value systems” (1994: 3). Media Studies scholar James Carey takes this one step further by pointing out that “society is possible because of the binding forces of shared information circulated in an organic system” (1989: 22). In order to achieve this, he argues, one needs *communication*.

To Carey, communication “is the basis of human fellowship; it produces the social bonds, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible (1989: 22). In his classic 1989 essay Carey outlines two different views of communication: The *transmission view of communication* and the *ritual view of communication*. The former is defined by such terms as ‘sending’ or ‘giving information to others’. Its primary function is “the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of *control*” (1989: 15). Carey sees its roots in the historical (Western) developments of communication, which was used to expand control beyond the areas of immediate reach.

In contrast, the *ritual view of communication* is linked to terms such as 'sharing', 'participation', 'association', 'fellowship' and 'the possession of a common phase'. Carey reminds us that this definition exploits the common roots of the terms 'communion', 'community' and 'communication'. “A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but towards the *maintenance of society in time*; not that of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (1989: 18). Its primary function is *community building* through “the construction and to maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control, and container for human action” (1989: 19). Rather than receiving pure information, the

reader is presented with “a portrayal of the contending forces of the world” (1989: 20). Communication through the mass media then, “is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (1989: 23). Thus, it views “reading a newspaper less as sending on gaining information” but more as “a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed (1989: 20).

In short, “if the archetypal case of communication under a transmission view is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred community that draws persons together in fellowship and community” (1989: 18). Whereas under the transmission view, media effects are seen as mechanical and rather more direct causes of information and misinformation, the ritual view takes into account the sentiments and worldview of the with which the news is being negotiated by the reader. “We do not encounter questions about the effect of functions or messages as such, but the role of presentation and involvement in the structuring of the reader's life and time” (1989:21).

Neither of these functions of communication denies what the other affirms:

A ritual view does not exclude the processes of information transmission or attitude change. It merely contends that one cannot understand these processes aright except insofar as they are cast within an essentially ritualistic view of communication and social order (Carey, 1989: 21-22).

Yet, for the purpose of this thesis, with the adressal of collective identities through the news media at its core, I will be working in particular with the second part of Carey’s idea. This is not to understate the importance of the first role of mass media communication. However, as stated above, for the purpose of investigating the adressal of collective identities in relation for conflict resolution in accordance with Human Needs theory, I consider the second view of communication as more appropriate. Thus, my attitude in tackling the problem can be summed up by yet another quotation of James Carey:

When we think about society, we are almost always coerced our traditions into seeing it as a network of power, administration, decision, and control - as a *political order*. Alternatively, we have seen society essentially as relations of property, production, and trade - and *economic order*. But social life is more than power and trade... it also includes the sharing of aesthetic experience, religious ideas, personal values and sentiments, and intellectual notions - a *ritual order* (1989: 34; emphasis added).

## 4.2 Social roles or collective identities?

“Under a ritual sense, news is not information but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and actions... and invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, *social roles* within it” (Carey: 1989: 21; emphasis added). Yet although Carey talks about social roles, I will argue that this can also be true about collective identities.

Manuel Castells makes a clear distinction between role and identity, whereby roles are defined by norms structured by institutions and organisations of society, and their “relative weight in influencing people’s behaviour depend upon negotiations and arrangements between individuals and these institutions and organizations” (1997: 7). On the other hand, identities are “sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation” (1997: 7). Although identities can also be originated from dominant institutions,

...they become identities only when and if social actors internalise them, and construct their meaning around this internalization... Identities are stronger sources of meaning than roles, because of the process of self-construction and individuation that they involve. In simple terms, identities organise the meanings while roles organise the functions (Castells: 1997: 7).

Collective identities can often be defined through the social roles society imposes on or offers to groups, although meanings have to be internalised by the groups to become identities<sup>24</sup>. Yet, as Castells makes clear, social roles can have a considerable influence on the creation and shaping of collective identities. The news media, being a dominant institution in the position to shape social roles by inviting us to participate in the world through the distribution of communication, are consequently in a position to influence collective identities within a given society.

Yet, according to my understanding, this would refer more to a side-effect of the first role of communication assigned by Carey, rather than the essence of the ritual view of communication. In my view, Carey himself perceived the ritual role of the

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<sup>24</sup> In the case of Guatemala, it is at points difficult to grasp the difference between social roles and identities, as arguably much of society, and in particular the Mayan *pueblos*, is still organised along the lines of functions of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths providing orientation and circumscribing the realm of thought and behaviour, thus reflecting a pre-eminent collectivity. Yet, it is not the purpose of this study to examine the relation between social role and collective identity, or potential influences of a change in social role towards identity of Mayans in Guatemala. Rather, I shall take the influence stemming from social roles for collective identities as a given, and aim to illuminate the representation of collective identity in the Guatemalan news media and its consequences for conflict resolution.

news media as closely related to the shaping, creation and reinventing of collective identities – a notion commonly mirrored in the field of media studies. Carey continually refers to the *symbolic meaning* of news, to the creation, expression and conveyance of “our knowledge of and *attitudes* towards reality” (emphasis added; 1989: 30). Indeed when defining the ritual order Carey talks about “the sharing of aesthetic experience, religious ideas, personal values and sentiments, and intellectual notions” (1989: 34). Drawing on the definition provided by Manuel Castells, this more aptly describes the construction of collective identities rather than social roles, which provide the organisation of function within society. It is *collective identities* rather than *social roles*, which are at the core of the *construction of symbolic meanings*.

#### **4.3 Making meaning - the media, culture and identity**

The idea of ritual order, the sharing of aesthetic experiences, religious ideas, values, sentiments and intellectual notions is reflected by Dewey, who inspired much of Carey’s thought on the different functions of communication. He underlines that there is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community and communication.

Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common... are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding- likemindedness as sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie dividing it into physical pieces... Consensus demands communication (in Carey, 1999:22).

However, as Lewis points out, “to achieve this confluence of meaning-making, there must be some significant proximity or continuity,... there must be some overlapping or mutual imagining”. This shared of imagining where the media and audiences interact is *culture* (2002: 4-5).

Accordingly, Lewis argues, culture is best understood as “the process of meaning-making within a given social group” (2002: 3). While “the nation-state may represent one significant level of human culture”, an individual can participate in “a wide range of social groupings and their cultures: family, friendship group, religion, nation and the world” (2002: 12). Meaning-making within a given social group also stands at the core of collective identities, defined above as people’s source of meaning and experience”, based on “a cultural attribute or related set of cultural attributes that

is/are giving priority over other sources of meaning” (Castells: 1997: 6). Like identity, culture “is constitutive of the person... The meanings people incorporate into their lives are not separate from their activities; activities are made of meanings” (Schudson: 2002:141).

Though not steered as automatically as put forward by the transmission view of communication, these understandings and processes of meaning-making are crucially shaped through the information we receive, underlining Walter Lippmann’s famous statement that “the media act as a mediator between the world outside and pictures in our head” (in Griffin, 1997: 377). Few would still claim that journalism is able to portray the world ‘as it is’<sup>25</sup>, but journalistic news-coverage is in many cases our only means of information of the world around us, which is largely beyond our direct personal experience. By producing, maintaining, repairing, and transforming reality for the reader, the news media

are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups construct an ‘image’ of the lives, meanings, practices, and values of *other* groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces, can become coherently grasped as a ‘whole’ (Hall<sup>26</sup> in Spitulnik, 1993: 293).

By providing the picture of this ‘whole’, confirming the view of how the reader sees ‘the world at its roots’, news reports can shape ideas of one’s community and consequently the community itself. Community-building and the construction of collective identity channelled through the news media is resonated by Anderson’s famous notion of the ‘Imagined Community’ as a mass mediated collectivity where members may not all know each other, but where each shares the idea of a common belonging (1993). Indeed, Anderson argues that it was through the development of print media as the first mass media that the collectively imagined idea of nationalism could take place. In the new form of nationalism emerging between 1820 and 1920, a nation became something that through collective imagination could be consciously

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<sup>25</sup> For further discussion on limits to journalistic news coverage see Merrill, 1997, Kieran, 1997 and McNair, 1999

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Hall who in this context points to the ideological effects of the mass media in the cultural sphere is part of the British school of Cultural Studies which first stressed the thought of culture as a complex process mediated mainly by the social practices of the audiences (Hall, 1973; Morley, 1980). Reception studies, which considers reception as an active process, part of a social complexity, is a method closely related to this notion. In his influential study on TV news, Morley concludes that the audience’s specific decoding was influenced by the audience’s particular place in the social structure and that media use and interpretation could be understood as a social process (1980).

aspired and once imagined by adapting the stance of ‘official nationalism’, could be modelled, adapted and transformed.

Recent research explores the role of new communication technologies in the formation of imagined communities, particularly when faced with bridging large distances. The world-wide support raised for the Zapatista movement through the Internet is a much-cited paradigm (e.g. Garrido & Halavais, 2003). An example of collective identity reaffirmation along ethnic lines includes Sreberny who investigated how the Iranian Diaspora used local broadcast media for constructing a sense of an Iranian community in London (2001). Thus, the mass media with their role as vehicles of culture, as “forces that provide audiences with ways of seeing and interpreting the world, ways that ultimately shape their very existence and participation within a given society” are seen to play a considerable role in the formation and reinvention of collective identities (Spitulnik, 1993: 294).

What however will happen if the “presentations of what the world at root is”, as “a presentation of reality that gives life its overall form, order and tone” (Carey: 1998:21) is based on a culture, a way of meaning-making, that does not take into account the identity of a large part of the community? Which world views regarding the status of that minority are being shaped and confirmed in such a society and how does that influence the collective identities of these groups?

#### **4.4 Mainstream media and representation of minorities**

As discussed earlier the term ‘minorities’ used in this context applies to groups in terms of their powerlessness, rather than their numerical minority. Gross describes minorities as “defined by their deviation from a norm” and argues that “these deviations are reflected in the mirrors the media hold up before our eyes. In brief, minority share a common media fate of relative invisibility and demeaning stereotypes” (1998: 89). This appears to be a common finding in minority discourse: “Indeed, the history of minority media suggests that the use of negative stereotypes tends to dominate the portrayal of these groups, at least prior to their emergence as a valued audience segment, or an active political force” (Gandi: 2001: 602). An inherent disadvantage is that minorities will invariably be culturally bilingual, while the majority will have no such burden (Gross, 1998: 93).

Negative portrayal of minorities can be particularly harmful in the face of media influence towards the shaping of collective identities, as discussed above. In Guatemala, Montejo points out that through media representations, negative stereotypes “become set in the national consciousness and take on the aura of natural hereditary traits” (2005: 44). A consequence of the negative image of Mayan culture is not only a further chasm between mestizo and Mayan culture, but also a negation of indigenous culture by the Mayans themselves<sup>27</sup>.

Yet, this is not necessarily a one-way process.

There are differences as well as similarities in the ways in which various minorities are treated by the mass media... And, because there are important differences in the conditions that they face in our society, the effects of their media images are different for members of the various minority groups (Gross: 1998: 89).

Thus, the conditions prevalent in society for the particular minority shape the presentation of the minority’s media image, which in turn shapes the society’s perception of the particular group.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Lina Barrios, 28.01.2006

## **Chapter 4: Guatemala and its relevance for the need for identity**

This chapter outlines the historical creation of the Mayan peoples' imperative to fulfil their needs of recognition and identity and some of the challenges they face in present day Guatemala, thus setting Human Needs theory into context. While my thesis focuses on the media in a post-conflict society, thus focusing on the society after the end of the civil war, the distinct ethnic dimensions of the civil war make it unfeasible to not view the violence as part of a conflict that has accompanied the indigenous people of Guatemala for the last 500 years. I conclude that a comprehensive attempt at conflict resolution must take into consideration the cultural aspects of negligence towards the Mayan population.

### **4.1 The civil war in Guatemala**

With the signing of the peace agreement in December 1996, 35 years of conflict between the Guatemalan army and a variety of guerrilla groups came to an end. Triggering the violence was the expropriation of 400, 000 acres of uncultivated land belonging to the US-based United Fruit Company (UFC) by the elected government of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1952. The government had passed an agrarian law which sought to redistribute all unused land from large holdings to landless peasants. UFC, Guatemala's biggest land owner at the time, cultivated no more than 15 per cent of its property and was offered compensation based on the company's own figures - which had largely undervalued the land for tax purposes. Unwilling to give up their holdings, the company's main shareholders turned to their powerful US connections in the CIA (Costello, 1997:n.p, also CIA Book)

Two years later a CIA-sponsored coup by a mercenary army overthrew the government, justifying the intervention in the light of US Cold War interventionist policies as part of a broader US strategy to contain the 'communist menace'. Land reforms were immediately reversed, and reformist dissidents were gradually eliminated as civil society was proscribed or destroyed through targeted repression by the subsequent military dictatorship.

With extensive military and economic assistance from the USA, Guatemala became a security state par excellence, designed to limit any popular protest which might threaten the status quo... Political space became soon so restricted that armed resistance was deemed the only viable means of expressing opposition to the authorities. (Costello, 1997: n.p.)



These internal struggles turned into a civil war when a coalition of rebel movements with communist tendencies, comprising army dissidents, radical students and left-wing political activists, all middle class Ladinos, took up arms in 1962<sup>28</sup>. Soon indigenous people joined the struggle, creating more guerrilla formations. The war consequently waged by the government on indigenous peasants to eliminate dissidents and guerrilla support was so harsh, that anthropologists such as Ricardo Falla used the metaphor of “draining all water from the pond in order to catch a few fish, and thereby killing everything in it” (in Thompson, 2001: 12).

Even by the sad standards set by Latin America in the period, the Guatemalan civil war took a tremendously heavy toll: Of around ten million inhabitants at the time, estimates suggest a minimum of 200,000 deaths, in addition to 40,000 people who ‘disappeared’ after being arrested by the military. Over 400 villages were destroyed, 200,000 people were forced to flee to neighbouring Mexico and about one million people were displaced internally (Handy: 2002; Carey, 2004: 70). The Guatemalan version of truth commission, the Commission to Clarify History, detailed 658 massacres, almost all of them occurring in the most brutal period from 1978 to 1984. In his introduction to the report, the coordinator of the commission, Christian Tomuschat, wrote that the army and other security services of the state arrived at the ‘complete loss of human morals’. The commission reported further that of the 80,000 victims over 83 per cent were Mayans, and argued that in four areas of the country, where Mayans constituted close to 98 per cent of those affected by the violence, the army engaged in ‘acts of genocide’ in which the army “contemplated the total or partial extermination of the group” (in Handy 2003: 279).

A conflict that had its origins in Cold War ideological differences, therefore soon took on distinct ethnic dimensions making it no longer possible to treat Mayans solely as part of a ‘landless peasants versus landowning elites’ problem. To understand the reasons behind this, one has to examine the complex relationship between indigenous people and those with a Ladino identity.

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<sup>28</sup> Over the years, four different guerrilla groups existed in Guatemala, which in 1982 merged into the Guatemalan National Revolutionary group, or Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG)

## 4.2 Nationalism and the formation of Ladino identity

The rift between Ladinos and Indians did not appear overnight. As mentioned earlier, the term Ladino does not refer to people with European ancestors - though this appears to be the dominant discourse among the Guatemalan populace - but to those who orientate themselves on Hispanic or European culture.

Shortly after the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores in 1524, Spanish settlers began to intermix with the indigenous population. Through the provision of different rights, Spanish distinctiveness was sharply separated from Indian identity. After a while the children of these mixed relationships developed their own mestizo identity. The term ladino was originally introduced for those who spoke Spanish. Yet over time, some Mayans began to adapt European-orientated values, thus forsaking their Mayan identity. In his history of highland Guatemala, Grandin outlines how wealthy K'iche Mayans often adopted Ladino identity in their efforts to secure political power and to better their business situation (2000). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these groups melted together with those of Hispanic descent to create the Ladinos – now seen as ‘non-Indians’.

Under the Spanish crown, Mayans were treated mostly as slaves or serfs. After Guatemala gained its independence from Spain on September 15 1821, there was much concerned discussion of how to deal with ‘the Indian problem’, as with the emergence of a nationalist agenda, links between language, people and nation were created. Subsequently, the 1824 Constitution of Guatemala attempted to create a ‘homogenous nation’, in par with prominent discourse assuming that to be Guatemalan meant to be a Ladino, and to be a Ladino meant to be a non-Indian (French, 1999: 284-283). While the current division between Ladino and Indian thus emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it guided much of the assimilationist policy put forth in 20<sup>th</sup> century Guatemala<sup>29</sup> (Smith, 1990).

Another implication of the division was that Mayans continued to deal with many tasks, which in Western traditions are seen to be located at a state level, in a traditional and localised manner. This included communal justice brought by elder

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<sup>29</sup> Among other prominent proponents of a monocultural and monolingual Guatemala was Nobel Prize winner Miguel Angel Asturias, who wrote about Indian interference with the creation of a modern homogenous nation and hoped that “the study of our societies will provide us with the opportunity to make a racially, culturally, linguistically and economically homogenous Guatemala” (in French, 1999: 283).

councils. Drawing on a case study on the development of ethnic and national identities in late-19<sup>th</sup> century Huehuetenango, Watanabe concludes that ethnic struggles for municipal control and local efforts to title community lands led Maya and state officials to develop contrasting understandings of each other and their relations. “Far from precipitating a national identity of mutual belonging, state formation intensified the racism and political violence that would rend Guatemala during the century to come” (2000: 321).

A common view of the indigenous population found its expression in the 1931 book on the Guatemalan Indian by Fernando Juarez Muñoz, who saw indigenous people full of vices: In his view, they were “unsocial, fearful, lazy, bitter, hateful and drunken” (Handy, 2002:n.p.). While racist arguments were arguably widespread ideology at the time, Guatemala has a special standing in Latin America in that the majority of the population is indigenous. Though after the end of the 1940s indigenous people could no longer be forced to conduct unpaid labour, little changed regarding the conceptualisation of a homogenous Guatemalan nation<sup>30</sup> (Madsen, 2000: 24). Examples of how Mayan identity was concealed, includes the language policy based on Spanish only which led to the extinction or endangerment of less pervasive Mayan languages, as well as economic and participatory disadvantages for the Mayans (Richards & Richards, 2001). While political indigenous identification was discouraged at best, it was brutally suppressed at worst, constantly inspired by a fear of an Indian revolution: One example often mentioned is that, just as Muslims were expelled from Spain after 800 years of occupation, the Mayans might want to expel the Ladinos today (Colop, 1996: 112-113). Others used the wars between the Mayan peoples in pre-colonial times as an example of the brutality of the Indians, and a justification for the vicious warfare directed against the Mayans in the 1980s (in Madsen, 2000:29). Thus, as Kay Warren sums up, “to be indigenous was to be treated as the dangerous ‘Other’” who had to be kept under control - if necessary by all means (2003: 108).

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<sup>30</sup> By implementing the notion of assimilation to the dominant culture, the Guatemalan state adopted what Coakley terms “by far the most common strategy of all for dealing with problems of ethnic diversity” (2003:30).

#### 4. 3 The Pan-Mayan movement and the rise of Mayan identity

Yet, as Montejo underlines, despite the extreme attempts to annihilate Mayan culture, the Mayans survived (2002). The extremity of suppression and discrimination aimed towards the indigenous population in the years of the civil war actually resulted in the opposite of the effect intended, as it brought about a revitalization of Mayan identity. Fischer and MacKenna Brown write “one would hardly expect Maya self-determination to be the rallying cry to rise out of the ashes of Guatemala’s holocaust,... yet that is exactly the case” (1996: 5). Warren elaborates:

One response to this violence, which drew power from corrosive and very public racism, has been the revitalization of indigenous identity... Mayas are now attempting to create novel identifications to push not only for recognition and self-determination, but also for a reconfiguring of national culture and state policy to promote federalism and the support of Mayan schools, the legitimacy of customary law, and the right of Mayas to have court interpreters so that they can follow legal proceedings” (2003: 108).

While the indigenous population began to get actively involved in the civil war in the 1970s, however, issues of Mayan identity were not taken up by the parties. The guerillas were not initially fighting for indigenous interests. Rather, many groups orientated themselves along communist peasant/land-owner divisions. Many guerrilla *commandantes* had just as little regard for indigenous people as the army<sup>31</sup>.

Sexton describes how Ignacio Ujpan, a citizen of the Lake Atitlan region, perceived both army and guerrillas as led by Ladinos taking advantage of the Mayan people (2001: 16). Yet, the ethnic dimensions of the war, including forced recruitment, land evictions and targeted violence against the indigenous population, overwhelmingly committed on the side of the army – the Guatemalan Clarifying Commission attributed 3 per cent of the killings to guerrillas and 93 per cent to the army - led to a more widespread support of the guerrillas among the indigenous population<sup>32</sup>, particularly in the most brutal years of counterinsurgency 1978 – 1985 (CEH figures in Bendiksby, 1999: 19; Plant, 1999: 324; Montejo: 2002).

While prior to the height of the conflict the only organized indigenous voices were expressed through peasant organizations, which often developed close links to the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP), new indigenous or pro-indigenous

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<sup>31</sup> One example is the first guerrilla group FAR (Rebel Armed Forces), who according to Hey assumed that “the Indians of the highlands were backward and unable to aid the revolutionary cause” (1995:35).

<sup>32</sup> One prominent example includes the later Nobel Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu (Stoll: 1999).

organizations emerged linked to the political opposition and the so-called popular movements based on human rights, antimilitarization and the abolition of civil patrols. By the late 1980s a new form of indigenous movement emerged that, unlike its predecessors, gave priority to cultural rights and political status of Mayans all across Guatemala and took “enormous pride in the Mayan cultural heritage”, while “creating and re-creating their Mayan culture”, the so-called Pan-Mayan movement (Montejo, 2002:128-129, also refer to Warren: 1998).

Plant suggests that the emergence of these more specifically Mayan organizations can be attributed to the efforts of indigenous professionals to take advantage of the new space offered by constitutional reforms after the democratic transition in 1986. It also signalled a rejection of the guerrilla leaders, by whom they felt betrayed because of the guerrillas’ technique of launching a strong offensive, only to retreat, leaving indigenous people to bear the brunt of the army’s retaliation (1999: 324-325). The Pan-Mayan movement has since stressed its distance to army and guerrilla, and to both left-wing and right-wing ideology (Warren: 1998).

Culturalist-orientated groups soon began to work on a national level, specifically coordinating their demands in the cultural and political area by e.g. publishing a booklet on specific demands by the Mayan people through the Council of Mayan Organizations of Guatemala (COMG) in 1991 (Plant, 1995: 326). At the same time, “the Pan-Mayan and grassroots left movements came together to reshape Guatemalan politics so that it became increasingly responsive to indigenous issues. In the process, the movements mutually influenced each other’s political vision, without, however, eroding many of their fundamental political differences” (Warren, 2001:155). This meant that the Pan-Mayan movement emerged from this process with a higher political profile and a clearer agenda for institutional reform while the grassroots left-wing movements became more aware of its internal ethnic diversity (Warren, 2001:156). A major achievement was the signing of the Accord on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People<sup>33</sup> in 1995 as part of the negotiation process for the 1996 Peace Accords, a result of continued pressure from Pan-Mayan activists. The Accord entails clear demands on behalf of indigenous culture and identity, and showed

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<sup>33</sup> The 1995 Agreement on the Rights and Identity of Indigenous People gives strong emphasis to cultural rights, and was influenced by the international Labour Organisation’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No.169. For a full text refer to MINUGUA, the UN mission in Guatemala (1995).

that the Mayans are clearly a voice to be reckoned with (Warren, 2001: 156, Montejo, 2002: 140).

One difference in the Pan-Mayan movement compared to the left-wing popular movements lies in its specific cultural roots, as it is not another peasant movement, but specifically addresses the cultural needs of identity and recognition of the Mayan people (Warren, 2001: 156). It also differs from traditional Mayan institutions as it reaches across all Mayan peoples and operates on a national level, while traditional Mayan institutions are operating on a local level including elder councils (Fisher & McKenna Brown 1996: 14-15). By creating the culture-based Pan-Mayan movement, Mayan intellectuals had clearly recognized the threat to their culture and identity, and responded by emphasizing their cultural rights.

Yet despite the successful signing of the 1995 agreement, as well as fundamental alterations to the Guatemalan state in the fields of schooling and language<sup>34</sup>, the record of the pan-Mayan movement has not been very inspiring. One of the difficulties the movement is facing is the aperture between particularity and universalism when attempting to participate on an equal footing in national society, albeit through representative indigenous institutions on the one hand, and its drive for a special and sometimes separate status for the social, cultural and even economic and political institutions of indigenous people on the other (Plant, 1999: 319). Despite the fact that the Pan-Mayan movement views all Mayans along the line of a common Mayan heritage and agenda (Montejo, 2005), the 21 Mayan groups are notoriously split among themselves, as in the strong competition for resources, in which bigger groups often manage to out-manoeuvre smaller ones<sup>35</sup>. The groups are divided among linguistic lines, and Mayans often resort to communicating in Spanish, as there is no common Mayan language<sup>36</sup>.

The biggest backlash yet was the 1999 referendum, designed to measure the civilian support for a wide range of reforms, including those that dealt with indigenous issues and the redefinition of Guatemala as a multicultural, ethnically plural and

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<sup>34</sup> Yet, although the Guatemalan government has recognised Mayan languages as languages in their own right (rather than dialects) in 2003, the country's only official language remains Spanish.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Estheiman Amaya, 18.01.2006

<sup>36</sup> This is often not only used as a sign for ethnical 'confusedness' and as an argument questioning the legitimacy of Mayan demands, but also as reason by the Guatemalan government for why Spanish remains the only official language.

multilingual state. The NO vote prevailed with a margin of 55 percent, but only 18 per cent of the registered voters bothered to cast their vote. Few were surprised by the Ladino support of the NO vote, “as any change in the ethnic status quo was deeply problematic to many Ladinos who see themselves as the westernized mainstream of the country and the rightful representatives of its Hispanic national culture” (Warren 2002: 163). Reasons for the large abstentions of the indigenous population were seen to include a lack of information for the Mayans, who in large parts did not know that there was a referendum at all, or did not realize its significance (Carey, 2000), as well as threats and violence through the well-financed right-wing opposition<sup>37</sup> and reasons that are embedded in the Mayan culture itself, such as Mayans having very little confidence in the government (Carey: 2000) Historical separation from Ladino political affairs as well as the retention of ancient Mayan traditions, meant that Mayans habitually dealt with their affairs on a local level e.g. through elder councils, and avoided getting involved in state politics as that had rarely bettered their situation. The national-level referendum therefore went against Mayan socio-cultural experience, as shaped by the violent suppression of their cultural needs.

Arguably, much of the lack of political awareness stems from the legacy of cultural negligence. Montejo laments that “while some Mayan ideologists are busy thinking about ways of creating a multicultural and multiethnic nation state, the majority of the Mayan population, which is rural, is living in a state of political amnesia due to its high rate of illiteracy”. He underscores that the development of Mayans on a cultural level, encompassing education both in Mayan and Western values, has to be strengthened for indigenous people to be able to use political means in their demands for achieving an equal footing in society (2002:126).

Thus, as the indigenous agreement remains the least implemented<sup>38</sup> (Carey, 2004: 71), little had changed for the Mayan population ten years after the signing of the Peace Accords<sup>39</sup>. The main reason for this, according to the great majority of my

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<sup>37</sup> One example includes the murder of two well-known proponents of the reforms two days before the referendum (Handy, 2002:n.p.)

<sup>38</sup> Also mentioned in my interview with Estheiman Amaya 18.01.2006 and Lina Barrios 28.01.2006

<sup>39</sup> Lina Barrios estimates that only about ten to 20 per cent of the Peace Accords had actually been implemented in Jan 2006. Interview with the author, 28.01. 2006. She attributes this failure to the lack of political will, the lack of resources, the lack of cooperation from the civil society and the lack of information on the Peace Accords among the Guatemalan population.

interviewees, is a lack of political will. Estheiman Amaya, Senior Advisor for the Secretary for Peace<sup>40</sup> speaks of an ancestral discrimination deeply embedded in the Guatemalan culture. In his view many Guatemalans do not want to pay attention to their own discriminative behaviour<sup>41</sup>, yet it is first when demands for affirmative action on behalf of the indigenous people are voiced that many people raise concerns about discrimination – towards the non-indigenous population<sup>42</sup>. It is precisely the lack of acknowledgement of pre-veiling ethnic prejudices that lead Christian Tomuschat, coordinator of the Clarification Commission in Guatemala, when summing up the challenges facing post-1996 Guatemala, to emphasise that “the true challenge to the Ladino group of the population is to acknowledge that the racist ideology that has pervaded Guatemala for centuries has been one of the main reasons for the ruthless treatment of the Mayan communities” (2001: 257).

As the Guatemalan Ladino population traditionally defines itself by little more than being non-indigenous, the rise of the Pan-Mayan movement caused concern and even fear among the non-indigenous part of the population, as the reconstruction of Mayan identity also questions traditional conceptions of ‘Guatemalan’ identity. From a Ladino perspective, Casaus Arzu suggests:

First, since we never reaffirmed our identity, we do not strengthen our Ladino culture, and, besides, we never think in terms of the nation since, as the hegemonic class, the Nation-State used to be ours. To the extent another ethnic group formulates a different project in much more inclusive terms, Ladinos go into a panic, manifested in predictions of an ethnic war, but also in a greater interest in discussing Ladino identity (in Warren, 2001:159)

To Joel Mejia Ortiz, being Guatemalan in present-day Guatemala signifies being Ladino, as the dominant Ladinos fail to identify themselves with their indigenous people, and the Mayans identify themselves along their local linguistic groups<sup>43</sup>. Whereas Mayans have a clearer, though historically defined cultural identity, anthropologist Lina Barrios describes Ladino identity as ambivalent. When inside Guatemala, elites are trying to mimic European policy, culture and values while

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<sup>40</sup> The Secretary for Peace is in charge of monitoring the implementation of the 1996 Peace Accords

<sup>41</sup> A statement made during an informal conversation with a highly educated Guatemalan woman seems to sum up this attitude: “I am not a racist”, she said, “to me the Indians are *almost* equal”.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Estheiman Amaya, 18.01.2006

<sup>43</sup> Interview with the author, 09.02.2006



indigenous culture is perceived to be 'no good', when travelling abroad mestizo Guatemalans proudly point to the achievements of the historical Mayans<sup>44</sup>.

Montejo presents a similar argument when he describes the apparent chasm between the 'backward Indian' who is slowing down Guatemalan development on the one hand, and the impressive feats of the 'classical Mayans' on the other (2005). This negative image of indigenusness leads to the negation of Mayan culture among parts of the Mayan population<sup>45</sup>, as Mayans are continuing to adapt Ladino or Western culture, still seen as a synonym for modernity. Based on the constructivist take on ethnic identity prevalent in Guatemala, the theme of race has been replaced with culture (Casaus Arzu, 2002: 22).

#### **4.5 Living-conditions in current Guatemala**

Being one of the poorest countries in the Latin American region, the Guatemala continues to struggle with economic difficulties. According to a 2001 report by the U.S. State Department, over 85 percent of the Guatemalan population live in poverty (IDEX: n.p.)<sup>46</sup> Problems regarding the unfair distribution of land which eventually led to the outbreak of the civil war continue to this day. MINUGUA, the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala estimated in 2000 that 2% of the population owns 65% of the arable land, 75% of the best quality land is held by 1% of producers, while 20% of the land is utilized by 96% of producers (in Bailliet, 2002:6). In 1999, 81% of all farm land was held by non-indigenous people (FONTIERRAS in Fijate, 2004:5)<sup>47</sup>.

Coupled with the continuing the lack of political for affirmative action, the desolate Guatemalan economic situation and the countries strong centralist policies, the predominantly rural indigenous population continues to live in a severely disadvantaged situation. While "the national poverty and extreme poverty rate fell both for indigenous people, indigenous people are not catching up (Worldbank, 2006: n.p.). The poverty headcount for indigenous people by 14 percent between 1989 and 2000 to

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with the author, 28.01. 06

<sup>45</sup> Also refer to Interview with Claudia Mazariegos 23.01.2006 and Lina Barrios, 28.01.2006

<sup>46</sup> Of the total Guatemalan workforce, 75.4 per cent of workers are holding informal positions, meaning that they are not receiving a regular income (ASIES, 2005: 2).

<sup>47</sup> Gender inequality in the country is at an extreme as of those in the top ten percent income bracket, almost 75 percent are men. In contrast, of the poorest ten percent of the population, 75 percent are women (IPEX: n.p.).

74 percent, while the poverty headcount for Ladinos fell by 25 percent during the same period to 38 percent. The extreme poverty headcount for indigenous people was at 24,3 percent in 2000, while for Ladinos it was at 6.5 percent (Worldbank, 2006:n.p.).

While 57.50 percent of the indigenous population was counted as literate in 1998, 78.60 per cent of the non-indigenous population could read or write, making education a ladino privilege (PNUD in Adams & Bastos, 2003: 181). In addition, the great majority of teachers was and is continuing to have a Ladino background and almost never speak Mayan languages (Adams and Bastos, 2003: 183). While only about three per cent of Guatemalans are able to attend higher education, the number of indigenous people at universities is even lower, leading Joel Mejia Ortiz of Cholsamaj to estimate that only one percent of Mayans attend higher education, and out of one million Mayans, only one holds a PhD<sup>48</sup>.

In May 2005, a successful charge of racial discrimination brought to attention by Nobel-price winner Rigoberta Menchu attracted much media interest, as it was the first racism trial in the country. Among the convicted Guatemalan politicians<sup>49</sup> was the grandson of General Montt, under whose military rule large parts of the genocide among the indigenous population took place. The five politicians had openly taunted Menchu comments such as “Go and sell tomatoes at the market, Indian”. As discrimination against those with an indigenous cultural background prevails, the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Comité para la Eliminacion de la Discriminacion Racial) in Guatemala concluded in February 2006 that ‘racism continues to exist in all aspects of Guatemalan life’ (United Nations Newsservice:n.p.).

#### **4.6 Cultural implications on conflict resolution in Guatemala**

The perpetuation of ethnic prejudices on the one hand, and the effects of the suppression of identity and recognition of the indigenous people throughout its modern history on the other hand, is continuing to leave its mark on the country, thus making a cultural needs approach immensely relevant to comprehensive conflict resolution ten years after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996.

Conflict resolution remains a complex project, which must take the complicated interplay of cultural or acceptance needs, access needs and security needs into account

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with the author, 09.02.2006

<sup>49</sup> The guilty were giving the option to pay a fine in order to avoid the two-year prison sentence.

in order to prove successful. A fruitful attempt at resolution thus rarely rests on 'one leg only'. Yet, due to the deep historic chasm between Ladinos and Mayans, highlighted by the country's unusual position in Latin America of having an indigenous majority, as well as the ethnic dimension of the civil war, cultural needs appear to lie at the basis of much conflict potential in Guatemala. In light of a constructivist view of ethnic identity as discussed above, being Mayan is inherently connected to being able to express Mayan culture. Although government policy has changed rapidly since the mid-1990s, the negligence of Mayan recognition and identity will have to be addressed further for a comprehensive resolution of the conflict.

## Chapter 5: The media in Guatemala

### 5.1 Journalism in trouble

In his disheartened description of the Guatemalan media, Estheiman Amaya concludes:

Fear is still very pervasive, censorship is alive and well, and the media in Guatemala are still subject to threats and manipulation. This government or the next may not graciously grant freedom of expression; yet somehow Guatemalan society will have to gradually pass from a feudal mentality to one that practices public dialogue and debate (2002: 34).

Guatemala's media are hampered by a variety of factors regarding their power and freedom of expression. Media ownership in the country is marked by monopoly, whereby all of its national newspapers are owned by two competing news groups, both of which are affiliated with 'the famous twenty', a number of closely related elite Guatemalan families, who control the country's major sources of income and have considerable political influence (Casaus Arzu: 2002). This caused media monitor Freedom House to declare that media freedom has declined during the last years from partly free to not free (2004). The four main private television stations<sup>50</sup> and 90 per cent of all commercial radio stations are owned by one individual, the brother in law of the former Minister of Communication and Transport (Freedom House: 2004).

Two major news outlets own the five biggest daily newspapers in the country. Cooperacion de Noticias owns the broadsheet *Siglo Veintiuno* as well as the tabloid *Al Dia*. They are in fierce competition with the larger of the two groups, a news conglomerate controlling the biggest-selling broadsheet *Prensa Libre* also holds the most successful tabloid *Nuestro Diario*, as well as *elPeriodico*, another broadsheet which is available in the capital but which had discontinued delivery to Quetzaltenango in January 2006. In addition, the group also owns *El Quetzalteco*<sup>51</sup>, Quetzaltenango's bi-weekly regional paper, the biggest regional in the country.

The circulation numbers for the papers covered by my study are<sup>52</sup>:

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<sup>50</sup> A fifth channel is in the process of being established by the newspaper cooperation that holds the ownership of *Siglo Veintiuno*, and is meant to serve as an open channel with the possibility of broadcasting time for all of Guatemala's indigenous groups. However, as the holder of the commercial channels

<sup>51</sup> In April-June 2002, *El Quetzalteco* had an average circulation rate of 7,500 (Berganza, 2002:65).

<sup>52</sup> Figures hold true for July 2004-June 2005. Source: Verified Audit circulation, [www.verifiedaudit.com](http://www.verifiedaudit.com)

<b><i>Al Dia:</i></b>	Mon-Fri 37,983	Sat-Sun 42,026
<b><i>Nuestro Diario:</i></b>	Mon-Fri 280,359	Sat-Sun 269,198
<b><i>Prensa Libre:</i></b>	Mon-Fri 125,355	Sat-Sun 116,462
<b><i>Siglo Veintiuno:</i></b>	Mon-Fri 22,980	Sat-Sun 21,849

In his 2002 content analysis of the Guatemalan press, Gustavo Berganza analysed the proportional coverage of the following topics in the papers' news articles: The State and State Institutions; Democracy; Peace, Reconciliation and Dialogue; Gender; Multi- and Interculturality; and Rural Areas. For the papers covered by my study, his figures are as following:

**Fig 5.1**

	<b>State</b>	<b>Democracy</b>	<b>Peace</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Multiculturality</b>	<b>Rural</b>
<b>Al Dia</b>	13.7	8.1	0.9	1.3	0.8	3.1
<b>Nuestro Diario</b>	30.6	2.6	0.7	5.8	0.0	12.5
<b>Prensa Libre</b>	48.6	4.5	4.0	2.6	0.3	22.4
<b>Siglo Veintiuno</b>	20.7	2.6	1.8	0.6	0.2	1

For further information on classification categories etc. refer to Berganza (2002).

Even without going into too much into detail concerning Berganza's categorisation, it is evident that the area least covered is Multi-and Interculturality. These are the articles which have as their subject indigenous activities, transmit messages from Mayan organisations, and "recognise the multiethnic and multicultural reality of the Guatemalan society" (2002:33).

Another major issue hampering the freedom of expression in the country is the fact that Guatemala's political culture displays little understanding for criticism from the press or the idea of a 'fourth estate'. Sanctions and repressions (though often through indirect channels) were common even in the years following the signing of the Peace Accords, and assassinations, abductions, death threats and extralegal intimidation mean that the Committee to Protect Journalists described Guatemala as "one of the most dangerous places in the Americas to work as a journalists" (CPJ, 2003). Journalists faced intimidation and harassment because of their work, particularly regarding such sensitive topics as human rights, government corruption and crime, leading for example to the death of Hector Ramirez, chased to death when covering violent outbreaks of supporters of far-right General Rios Montt during a demonstration at the 2003 elections (Buckmann, 2003:47-48). After the election of

President Oscar Berger the same year the number of attacks has decreased significantly, reducing the number of recorded violent threats against newspaper reporters from 83 in 2003 to 42 in 2004 (Cerigua: 2004). Yet particularly provincial journalists continue to be threatened by local politicians, drug traffickers and organised crime groups (CPJ, 2004).

Self-censorship among journalists is not only widespread because of safety concerns, but also for reasons concerning job security and future career opportunities. In 2004, seven months after the election of President Berger, journalists of all major media organisations authored an anonymous letter pointing to the abysmal state of the Guatemalan media. The journalists claim that ‘economic interests obscure the truth, destroy the communication media and get involved in order to prevent that Guatemalans will hear the full truth’(Fijate, 2004:1). More recent examples include a story about members of the families making up the economic elite of the country being accused for fraud and money-laundering, attracted virtually no coverage by the Guatemalan media, even though it was reported extensively by the US press (Garcia Otrez, 2005:10). Sala de redaccion, a media monitoring journal published by NGO DOSES<sup>53</sup>, reports that in winter 2005 at least two print journalists were being offered bribes in exchange for positive coverage by high-ranking politicians (2005:4).

Additionally, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, media access is very limited. Newspapers are not delivered to remote areas, which in many cases also have no access to television and little access to radio, as TV sets and radio receivers like newspapers are prohibitively expensive for the poorer part of the population. High prices and the high illiteracy rate result in a non-existent ‘reading culture’<sup>54</sup>.

Lastly, the quality of media content is hampered by the lack of professionalism in the Guatemalan media, one of the main topics at the 2005 National Congress of Journalists (Sanchez, 2005:6). Although there now exist a number of higher education institutions providing professional journalism training, media observers lament a lack of journalistic values, something that journalism lecturer Claudia Mazariegos explains with the unwillingness of the major news organizations to pay for trained journalists, which rely on freelancers instead.

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<sup>53</sup> Sala de Redaccion is funded by the Norwegian Development agency, NORAD

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Raul Barreno Castillo, 24.01.2006. He states that in Guatemala, “guns are cheaper than books”.

During the years of civil war, the Guatemalan press was much criticized for its institutionalization of racism. Yet, there appears to be a clear improvement compared with the pre-peace accord coverage by the press, especially in the area of linguistic awareness, e.g. the derogatory term 'Indian' is no longer used. However, when quoting Mayans, typical accents and mistakes are emphasized<sup>55</sup>. Opinion columns by prominent indigenous writers such as Sam Colop feature regularly in the broadsheets. There was a general consensus among the persons I spoke to that the number of indigenous staff has increased significantly during the past ten years (partly due to the efforts of FUPEDDES) though I was unable to obtain exact figures.

Yet, the manner of indigenous representation in the press remains problematic. Gustavo Berganza of DOSES elucidates: "They don't call [the indigenous people] anymore stupid, or drunken or lazy, but on the other hand they tend to represent the Indian people as art or landscape"<sup>56</sup>. The many representations of indigenous people as victims, or as protesters and squatters, running threatening order and development in Guatemala are very negative. Thus, claims Berganza, "they tend to provide a very conflictive image of the Indians, and it is very scarce the opportunities when the media really depict the Indians as normal actors in the Guatemalan political life"<sup>57</sup>.

## **5. 2 Indigenous media outlets**

The importance of the media as a tool towards the cultural expression of Guatemala's indigenous peoples has been emphasized by a number of scholars such as Montejó (2005) and Amaya (2002). Indeed, Warren proposes that

Mayan leaders are concerned about two kinds of representation: first, the democratic representation of formerly marginalized and disenfranchised peoples in all national social institutions; and second, a Maya role in the mass media through which citizens constitute their politics and identities... Politicized identity and local culture are highly salient for understanding community responses to authoritarian politics and repression" (2003: 108).

There have been a number of attempts to create indigenous media outlets in Guatemala. Their goals do not necessarily include the use of Mayan languages in the mass media (Montejó, 2002:133), yet among other factors they have in common that

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Lina Barrios, 28.01.2006. She feels that this treatment makes the Mayans appear 'stupid'

<sup>56</sup> Interview with the author, 7.02.2006

<sup>57</sup> Interview with the author, 7.02.2006

they aim to “rescue the elements of the Mayan identity, such as customs, languages, spirituality and way to conceive the world” and to “give information on subjects that are interesting for the community, and which are not covered by the traditional press” (Amaya, 2002: 44). Many of these attempts on print, radio, TV and Internet levels have so far failed to be commercially successful, or even self-sufficient.

Apart from financial difficulties, an obvious problem in terms of print media is the poor level of education among Guatemala’s indigenous population. This is amplified by the fact that even among well-educated Mayans, few are able to read and write in their indigenous language. As far as the production of written media is concerned, 1994 figures estimated that of indigenous peoples, 29.49 per cent only spoke Mayan languages, while 34.53 per cent spoke both a Mayan language and Spanish <sup>58</sup> (INE National Census, in Adams & Bastos, 2003:79).

Despite the fact that the right to indigenous and participatory media is part of the Peace Accords signed in 1996<sup>59</sup>, governments have so far continued to yield to pressure from the commercial media sector, arguing against the promotion and support of indigenous media on free air waves. Examples include community radio stations, which in spring 2006 were still illegal, if they had not competed for their frequency in regular commercial auctions, which they can seldom afford, particularly when based in poor rural areas<sup>60</sup>. As this thesis is concerned with the transformation of society in general, I will not look at the niche media about the mainstream media, as they arguably – through their much larger reach – hold a bigger potential influence.

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<sup>58</sup> A further 28.65 percent of the indigenous population had lost their Mayan language and spoke only Spanish.

<sup>59</sup> Excerpt from the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, III. Cultural Rights, H. Mass Media, Paragraph 2): The Government shall: “Promote, in the Guatemalan Congress, the reforms of the existing Act on radio communications that are required to make frequencies available for indigenous projects and to ensure respect for the principles of non-discrimination in the use of the communications media. Furthermore, promote the abolition of any provision in the national legislation which is an obstacle to the right of indigenous peoples to have their own communications media for the development of their identity.”

<sup>60</sup> This however has far from stopped community radios all together. Estimates suggest that about 240 community radio stations operate in Guatemala, many of which in an unofficial agreement with authorities to keep the reach just to their immediate community (Viscidi: 2004). The majority of these stations are funded by churches, and far from development journalistic goals, serve mainly to spread evangelicism.



## Chapter 6: Empirical Findings

This section discusses each focus group in depth. The length of the discussion varies according to number and profundity of the themes discussed by each group. Digital recordings of each focus group discussion can be found in Appendix 5.

### 6.1 Focus Group 1 (recorded 16.01.2006)

Focus Group 1 consisted of seven ‘peace promoters’ working for NGO FUPEDDES in Quetzaltenango. Essentially involved in community development, the peace promoters are employed to provide the link between the NGO and rural communities in the department of Quetzaltenango, organizing seminars and conferences for the newly established ‘Together we create a Culture of Peace’ project. The peace promoters were all under thirty, and three of them were still attending university when the interview took place. There is only one person who did not receive any university education. Five of the participants have received or are still receiving formal journalism training through a joint project of FUPEDDES and Guatemala’s only state-run university, San Carlos.

The group consisted of predominantly indigenous and rural members, with only two participants calling themselves Ladinos or Mestizos and only one member growing up in a city environment. Working for an organisation that specifically promotes indigenous identity development with a strong focus on freedom of speech for Mayans, the group was trained in the area and supposed to show an awareness of the addressal of indigenous interests in the Guatemalan media. The group proved to be very responsive to the questions raised, and provided a number of personal examples of their experiences of racial discrimination in Guatemala, which they viewed as highly relevant. The four men and three women ranged from the age of 21 to 29. Six of the seven participants are from a rural background, and five are indigenous. Radio is the medium most commonly used by the groups to obtain news, the newspaper most commonly read is *Prensa Libre*. For detailed media usage and ethnic background information for focus group 1 please refer to Appendix No. 2.1.

## **Theme 1: The Press in Guatemala**

The group revealed a rather negative view of the Guatemalan press, primarily pointing to its monopolized ownership consisting of two news cooperations. Commercial interests of the cooperations stand at the forefront. “The information is not that objective and even less true for certain, the news articles are manipulated, they are very interested in the ‘notos rojas’ [the red news, news that contain detailed descriptions and pictures of violent incidents] (indigenous male, min.13. 48-14. 41). The peace promoters criticised the extreme dumbing-down of the news in the cases of the two main tabloid papers, *Al Dia* and *Nuestro Diario* which were described as solely portraying “Blood, women and sports. Because that is why the stuff sells isn’t it?” (Mestizo woman min. 12.16-12.28). Throughout the discussion the peace promoters pointed to the strong focus on ‘notas rojas’. Reasons for this were seen in a lack of education and reading culture in Guatemala, and the fact that ‘readers are used this type of negative coverage’ and that ‘this type of news is expected to attract attention’. One participant told how the focus on negative news makes him refrain from using news media, as the news coverage will stop him from thinking positively.

I am one of those people who almost never reads the press nor do I watch the news on TV, almost never, because, when one reads the press, or one reads, uhm, watches TV, there are always bad news, there are always negative issues, and this in some way or other influences the way of thinking of how it is to be Guatemalan. I sometimes hear some words that people say: ‘How Guatemala!’ It is very backwards, and has 100 years to catch up, in all areas, technology, I don’t know, in... all areas, because of the armed conflict and all that. But they are talking a lot about the topic. A lot, a lot. And about how it should... how they can stop talk about things, so that we can start thinking positively, to change the mental structures that we have. And the communication media have a big influence in that because they always show negative news. Even if it is the reality, but at least, well sometimes I don’t like listening to the negative things, therefore, what I do is to close my ears, I do not read this stuff, and think positively. That’s my personal attitude. (Indigenous male, min: 29: 50 - 31.03)

The influence of the mass media in Guatemala was consistently pointed out to be very strong among those in a position to consume them<sup>61</sup>.

## **Theme 2: Indigenous coverage of the Press**

Centralisation appeared to be a major theme throughout the discussion, particularly when referring to indigenous people and the media. When pointing out manipulation

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<sup>61</sup> I will discuss this point in connection to indigenous identity on pages 60-61

of the news as a problem facing the Guatemalan press, one peace promoter pointed to political and economic reasons. Yet she also perceived the strong centralistic tradition of the Guatemalan press as a form of manipulation – and exclusion.

“Well, there is certain information that is manipulated, most of all those [news] with a political character... and economic, because logically, for the money of those concerned, or to compensate for this silence, or [recording unclear; min:16.38] but more than anything the general information of the media do not pay attention to all the republic, we are like between the information. Sometimes... Certainly, there are daily news, but only about what they are doing in the capital. From here [the rural areas] there is no information for there [the capital], not when the communities are making progress, what needs they have, nothing. It’s like... *only for them we say....* Like the information is centralized” (indigenous woman, min 16.16 – 17.12, own emphasis)

Her statement reflects a strong ‘Us versus Them’ sentiment, in which ‘we’ are the excluded, and frustrated at being so. It is not obvious from her statement whether ‘we’ means indigenous communities or rural communities in general, which in the area the interview was conducted, and where the participant stems from, is predominantly indigenous. I believe that the ‘we’ in this case reflects both her indigenous and her rural background. Throughout the discussion the group referred to the centralization of news when asked about media treatment of indigenous people, thus disclosing the highly generalized theme that in their opinion, indigenous people are rural. A story that the group pointed out ran the headline: “Traditional costumes in danger” on the front-page of the paper<sup>62</sup>. Yet one peace promoter pointed out that the story itself was ‘hidden away’ among the news from rural areas (regional news, yet region is everything outside the capital), implying a further feeling of exclusion from the capital, and hence important news (min. 37.50-38.10).

### **Theme 3: Indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan identity**

One mestizo peace promoter, when explaining why in her opinion indigenous newspapers were doomed to fail, said: “Normally, and unfortunately the people who live in the most rural areas are the most indigenous people, and the people in the centre [the capital] are the most developed ones” (min. 33.45-34.02). She is thus using indigenous as an antonym to developed, even though she expressed disagreement with the current situation and sympathy towards the indigenous cause. She later adds: “The

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<sup>62</sup> The story described how, due to the rising costs of materials but the steady price of costumes, traditional weavers are no longer able to live of the income provided through their work. For a copy of the article, see Appendix No. 3.1 The newspaper itself was unfortunately stolen.

majority of the population are illiterate the rural population are poor and that is why they do not read” (34.51). By meddling class, geography and ethnicity, she appears uncertain what indigenous identity consists of and draws on the theme that indigenous people live in rural areas –seen as synonymous with being underdeveloped - and that they are poor. This sentiment comes as a surprise regarding her professional background as a peace worker promoting indigenous cultural awareness. While other, in particular indigenous, participants did not disagree with her at that point of the discussion, their statements point to an understanding of indigenous identity along cultural linguistic, rather than social class lines.

Mayan images are seen as exploited for the purposes of obtaining help from the international community (indigenous woman, min: 36.19) or to illustrate stories of poverty. Images of and references to today’s indigenous people would not appear in articles covering archaeology and thus ancient Mayan culture in the country.

Conversely, Mayan images are seen to be used in connection with stories of tourism and folklore. A participant pointed out that Mayan priests no longer welcome the press do their ceremonies, as they dislike the folkloristic and exploitive coverage of their sacred rituals (min. 01:10.09). The group sees images referring to Mayan culture as exploited and rarely implying positive connotations. On the other hand, attractive stories or features meant to show every-day Guatemalan, such as a feature on love and partnership, would always portray Ladino images and values (min.37.30).

Being Mayan is seen to have negative implications for the ones bearing this description. When I questioned the group why a news article dealing specifically with contemporary practice of Mayan cultural heritage did not mention the words indigenous or Mayan, and whether the media should identify somebody’s ethnic identity or not, a mestizo women responded:

I think not because of the history that we have, right? 36 years of war. One connects the words ‘indigenous’ and Maya’ very much to that [the war]. Now, with the signing of the peace agreement, one treats this [issue] with being general, they have made campaigns aimed at increasing sensitivity, that all are Guatemalans, that all are equal, not indigenous, not Mam, not Kaqichel, not Mayans, not Ladinos, not anything. Just Guatemalans in general. There are similar campaigns to that right? Of living together. That’s why they don’t it, also for the feelings of the people. Because there was the concept of: ‘I am Maya, I am indigenous, I am worth less. I am inferior. That’s why they treated this issue in the last years like ‘we are all equals and it doesn’t matter whether you are Maya or whatever’ (min. 42.20- 43.10).

This sentiment was reaffirmed by the group. To avoid negative associations, it is better to be seen as 'being Guatemalan' than as 'being indigenous'. Being Guatemalan is described by the group as being part of one of the many ethnicities that make up Guatemala. Without their cultural identities, the group emphasises, Guatemala would not be Guatemala, but 'some other country'. Although these statements appear to be paradoxical, the core sentiment is that it is better not to be indigenous. The media are not using these phrases, because of the negative connotations this description appears to imply. While every Guatemalan is supposed to be equal, indigenous identity is better left unmentioned. The theme could thus be interpreted as a slight variation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where 'Everybody is equal, just some more so than others' in the way that in order to become equal, one better denied one's differences as they point to some sort of inherent inferiority. Comments and recountings of personal experiences by the indigenous members of the group throughout the interview underlined their sense of exclusion and consequent frustration. When questioned later the group agreed that ideally, one should be able to cover news stories in a way that makes it possible for the indigenous people to identify with their own ethnic group, thus promoting self-confidence, yet in reality this is far from happening (min. 59:38-01:00:27). One indigenous man said: "There are few who show their identity with pride" (01:01:29)

Throughout the discussion the peace promoters pointed to a strong influence in shaping perceptions and attitudes by the mass media in Guatemala. When questioned on perceived media effects in regards to indigenous people, an indigenous man responded:

The situation in this case is that there is not a lot... well you noticed that we talked a lot about how the news are centralized in the capital therefore the written media imposes fashion, lifestyle and stuff that one should buy, advertisements... A lot of indigenous people are well, letting go of all the culture that they have, all the richness that they possess, because for example there is an article in the press about a shoe, made by a big international brand, or that has been sent here from another country, and that the shoe is so much better, that it lasts longer and all that. The people are already losing all their identity, already it is not the same, there already being to wear this stuff, there are being to live with all this modernity, the way to dress, that they dye their hair... They are losing all the essence, all the essence of being Maya. Now a lot of people say that they can't see who is indigenous and who is Ladino, because they have already lost all that was theirs, all their identity (Indigenous male, min. 49:55 - 51:30).

Another indigenous man attempted to sum up the discussion by concluding:

What the press, and well all the communication media do is to firstly destroy the person, because, well when we start to say that everybody has to be thin, every has to be modern or this that and the other... They destroy us, therefore we don't like each other anymore how we are... That's when we start to loose our own identity (min. 01:24.27 01:25.07)

To general agreement, an indigenous woman added: "They confuse us" (min. 01:25.12).

### **Narratives and arguments focus group 1**

News coverage of Guatemala is perceived as very negative. The FUPEDS peace promoters view this as rather problematic, as they believe these negative media images influence their attitudes towards their country and the future development of Guatemala. While the group indicates that they perceive Guatemala in general stereotyped as backward and violent, coverage of indigenous issues is seen to amplify this negative perception. Mayans are seen to be dealt with in an excluding manner, portrayed as backward, rural and poor. Images and references to current Mayan culture imply negative stories or are seen as exploited to attract help from the international community, tourism or for folkloristic purposes. Everyday stories from Guatemalan life are seen to deal exclusively with mestizo images and culture.

Although the group knew that 'being indigenous' should not have any implications for the 'value' of a person, there persisted a sense of that in reality, it does have consequences, because being indigenous means ultimately being worse off. This reality is reflected in media discourse, which has certainly become more sensitive in using racial stereotypes, but in the group's point view carries over the notion of indigenous inferiority through a rather more careful, albeit excluding manner.

Guatemala's great uncertainty regarding its own achievements, which leads the country to aspire more to foreign culture than its own, is seen to hit indigenous people particularly hard. While they continue to have an identity more certain than the Guatemalan identity per se, this identity is also seen as particularly opposed to what Guatemalan society is meant to strive for. This leads to an insecurity particularly among young indigenous people, who in areas where through greater media access media influence is seen as particularly efficient, start to negate their indigenouness.

To focus group 1, the press reflects the century-old Guatemalan paradigm that in order to get somewhere, one has to adjust to Ladino or 'modern' values.

The seven peace promoters are trained in promoting indigenous cultural awareness and self-esteem. Nonetheless, their outlook can be described as reluctantly resigning to a situation which they perceive as very negative. The peace promoters' narrative points to a story of exclusion of the Mayan population by the dominant Ladino culture. Indigenous members drew on their every-day life experiences, to illustrate their tale of cultural discrimination in Guatemala. In their argumentation, they point out that transition of the Guatemalan society must come from a societal level.

The main themes I extracted from the discussion with focus group 1 are:

- Mayans are excluded
- Being Mayan is a negative thing
- Mayans have low self-confidence
- Mayan identity is being lost
- Indigenousness is perceived as exotic and this image is being abused
- Mayans are frustrated at their excluded position

These findings point to what the group perceives is a clear lack of recognition, here defined as being perceived as equally valuable in society without cultural particularity hampering ones success. In terms of identity, members pointed to the necessity of conforming to Ladino values, thus adapting to the imposed normalisation process of legitimising identity. Hopes for a project identity, a new all-inclusive Guatemalan identity were expressed. Cultural needs were thus seen to addressed insufficiently, even though a successful adressal was deemed as highly necessary. The news media was interpreted as reinforcing mechanisms aiding the normalisation of legitimacy identity.

## **6.2 Focus Group 2 (recorded 28.01.2006)**

Focus Group 2 consists of six journalism students at the Francisco Marroquin University in Quetzaltenango. All are attempting to pursue a career in journalism, and some are already employed in the mass media on a freelance basis. The university is private, and students have to pay comparatively high tuition fees, although it is much cheaper to attend classes in Quetzaltenango than in the capital, which is reflected in

the facilities. As they finance their studies privately, the students tend to come from a privileged background. Though Quetzaltenango is located in a part of Guatemala where the majority of the population is Mayan, few indigenous students chose to study journalism. This is reflected in the focus group, as only one member identifies himself as indigenous. The group was very amicable and engaged in the discussion, yet due to their definition of indigenusness and indigenous needs, they viewed the question of indigenous integration of little relevance and continuously referred to an identical answer to a variety of questions, thus disclosing few themes.

Three of the six journalism students have a rural or small-town background, the remaining three are from Quetzaltenango. Only two women were able to attend the group, yet they feature rather predominantly throughout the discussion. The students were chosen to reflect each level of the four-year degree course, and their ages vary from 18 to 36 years. The press is the medium most commonly used by the groups to obtain news, the newspaper most commonly read is *Prensa Libre*. For the detailed media usage and ethnic background of focus group 2 please refer to Appendix No.2.2.

### **Theme 1: The Press in Guatemala**

The group's impression of the mass media in Guatemala appears rather negative. When asked about their general impression of the press, a woman responded:

Unfortunately our written press, or television or radio is very manipulated. I am now referring to another topic, politics. Unfortunately in our media there are lot [of manipulations for political reasons]. Right now, in this moment, this government does not know how to integrate the media, and the press will not attack [the government]. Why? Because the press is monopolized in our country. It is organized around the powerful people. The powerful people are in with the government. That is why they don't expose bad things our government does. I think that our press is corrupted because of the manipulation of the big ones [the ones on top] (min. 1: 22 - 2.55).

A male journalism student later added: "I do not think that we have journalistic freedom" (min.3.55). Another mestizo male mentioned manipulation through the catholic press (3.15-03.27). Every participant pointed to manipulation, all making references to the 'big ones' the 'powerful ones' the 'ones above' or 'the government'. The group collectively pointed out that the country is ruled by a small, powerful elite which owns Guatemala's media institutions, and this was very noticeable in media discourse (until 5.45). Journalists disobeying the rules set by those in power face



repressions and intimidations, thus very few dare to uncover official untruths (min. 5.01, also 7.03- 8.57).

When questioned about the news coverage of the on-going violence, the group again referred to the government's failure to implement order. A mestizo woman spoke of 'exchanging the civil war against a number of violent conflicts between the social classes, different religions, different academic fractions, organised crime, drug smugglers etc.' (min. 9.20-9.55). Lack of coverage by the print media of the implementation of the Peace Accords was again seen as a failure of the government.

## **Theme 2: Indigenous coverage of the Press**

Regarding coverage of the Agreement of Rights and Identity of the Indigenous People, a mestizo man responded:

I think that at the moment the communication media are more focused on the city, because... I think a principal problem is that the people from rural areas do not know how to read. What one Guatemalan newspaper, it's called *Nuestro Diario*, does is that they put in photos, almost as big as half the page, that is how they deliver people the news. Well, you see *Nuestro Diario* reaches almost the [most remote] rural areas, whereas for example *Prensa Libre* is more for towns. I think *Nuestro Diario* is paying some attention to the rural areas where they can't read.[...] We also have to pay attention to language, as they do not speak Spanish (19.30 - 20.15).

Integration of indigenous people or preservation of the Mayan culture per se was not interpreted as a specific problem. As 'being indigenous' was firmly equalled with being rural, poor, and lacking in formal education, problems facing indigenous people were firmly associated with class. According to the journalism students, solutions to the indigenous problems would therefore have to be found on a structural level. The differences in culture were hardly mentioned, other than the use of Mayan languages which was seen as a structural disadvantage.

Another interesting point is the inherent assumption by the participant, which was mirrored by the group, that information about the implementation of the Agreement on the Rights and Identity of the Indigenous People was of concern almost exclusively to Mayans, Xinca and Garifuna, rather than an issue that concerns all Guatemalan citizens.

### Theme 3: Indigenous , Ladino and Guatemalan identity

Throughout the discussion the group equalled indigenous with being rural and un- or badly educated. Whenever asked about indigenous issues in connection to the written media, the group pointed to the pervasive indigenous illiteracy. This was also evident when the group debated media influence of the press among Mayans. A mestizo male suggested: “Sometimes it affects them... In the sense that if they can read... If they read the press it will affect them but the majority of the people from the countryside do not know how to read” (min.43.15 - 43.29).

Another participant suggested that the government should authorise community radios for the use of indigenous communities.

These radios could give information in their languages and [in the languages] of all the developed people. [...] [Using radios] would be more successful to distribute information to people who live on the countryside, to builders who don't know how to read, to people in general, right? In their own language and accompanied by music that I would imagine they like (Mestizo man, 20.31-21.22).

To him, developed people speak Spanish. Indigenous people are seen as living in the countryside - and by using the Spanish expression *del campo* - he implies that they are working as farmers, as well mentioning other unskilled labourers. His statement implies a clear division between illiterate, low-skilled indigenous people who are so different that they also have different taste in music, and developed non-indigenous Guatemalans. From his viewpoint, as Mayans cannot read, written media are not suitable. Information has to be distributed orally, e.g. by the means of radio. Others mentioned TV as a more appropriate means of communication for Mayans, such as the failed attempt of an ‘open’ Channel 5.

I consequently asked the group: ‘For whom are the written media in Guatemala?’ A participant answered: “For everybody”. (min. 37.50-37.55). However, others disagreed and a mestizo woman elaborated:

The majority of the written media in Guatemala are for the middle and upper classes. The lower classes, they are not so concerned with knowing how we are [what's going on]. They are interested in surviving in this country, which is not very developed. The people, the ethnic people, the poor people are not interested. Spending one or two Quetzals<sup>63</sup> on newspapers? They are not interested in that. They prefer to invest their money in bread, in tortillas, in simple food, the basic nutrition for the poor people. I think that it is because of our culture that the people are not informed. I guess the

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<sup>63</sup> A Quetzal has roughly the same value as a Norwegian Crown

majority of the people have a radio, and listen to that. But the written media? No, they are not for everybody (min. 37.55 -38.04)

Earlier in the discussion, when asked about indigenous representation in Guatemalan newspapers, the group unanimously pointed out that the coverage of the written media is aimed at Ladinos. Images of ‘typical Guatemalans’ thus represent non-indigenous reality. In fact, as Guatemala appears to be very much influenced by foreign culture, lifestyles are perceived as ‘the more Western, the better’ (min.27.25 – 28.22). This orientation towards foreign, Western or Mexican rather than Guatemalan culture was seen as a cause for concern, and was a theme mentioned throughout the discussion as Guatemalan identity is becoming ever more ambiguous. These Guatemalan ‘values’ are seen to be based on Ladino rather than indigenous culture however.

Interestingly, although the journalism students had come up with a number of suggestions for how the Guatemalan political and media landscape should work, nobody saw it as necessary to point out that the written media should be a common good. Reliable information is seen as essential for every citizen, yet the channel through which people receive this information does not seem to matter. When asked for their hopes for the future, the group once again referred to a better, stronger, less corrupt government, which will be able to tackle violence and ‘ignorance’ in the country (min. 44.55 – 47.02).

## **Narratives and arguments focus group 2**

Focus group 2 has a rather negative impression of the mass media in Guatemala. The lack of freedom of the press and many of the challenges the country is presently facing are attributed to structural reasons. The government, seen to be controlled by the powerful elite which runs the Guatemalan economy, is held responsible. The group follows a ‘classic’ top-to-bottom approach to transformation; little attention is paid to changes regarding the societal culture.

The group recognises the importance of information for Guatemala’s indigenous people, as they propose that information is important for everybody. However, as they firmly stick to the idea that indigenous people are rural and badly educated or illiterate, oral communication through radio or TV seems to be the most viable solution. Paradoxically however, newspapers were declared as too expensive for

Mayans. The possibility that there could be literate indigenous people, remained virtually unaddressed, even though I made a number of follow-up question indicating this scenario. Nobody suggested that indigenous people should be represented in the mainstream press, or that indigenous media needs should be paid special attention in the mainstream media.

The group has one indigenous member, yet whenever the discussion revolved around indigenous issues or Guatemalan identity, he did not participate. The remaining members of the group firmly identified themselves as Ladinos, and distanced themselves from their indigenous co-citizens. While I would interpret the students' attitude towards Mayans as sympathetic, being indigenous is still equalled to being underdeveloped. Integration into Guatemalan society for indigenous people seemed of little importance to the group. Problems are approached at a structural level, i.e. illiteracy and malnutrition, rather than a societal or cultural level, such as discrimination or racism. A change for the better is hoped to be found in a stronger, less corrupt leadership, rather than in attitudinal and cognitive transformation. This fusion of class and ethnicity comes as a surprise as Quetzaltenango has seen a number of powerful indigenous people, such as the current mayor among others.

Although the journalism students are in a privileged position for being able to attend a private university, they seemed to feel excluded from the Guatemalan elite. Interestingly, despite their journalistic background, the students appeared to be little interested in the marginalised stand of the indigenous citizens, and voiced little criticism of Guatemalan society's exclusionist tradition.

The participants' narrative told of the problems Guatemala is facing as an underdeveloped country, such as the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of elites, no freedom of press, and poverty. Underdevelopment is at the core of their argumentation, for the problems are seen to be caused by Guatemala's lack of economic and political resources. These issues are to be resolved on a structural level. The themes I extracted from the discussion with focus group 2 are:

- Guatemala is manipulated by elites who are both politically and economically powerful. This is reflected in the news coverage, which is perceived as manipulated
- The country's elite has a strong orientation towards Western values, rather than trying to come to terms with its own national identity

- Being indigenous equals being rural, uneducated and poor. The group thus interpreted ethnicity among the lines of social class, rather than culture
- The inclusion of Guatemala's indigenous people into society concerns indigenous groups, rather than Guatemala per se. This is seen to be achieved on the basis of economic development rather than cultural inclusion

Throughout their arguments, the group expressed a strong association with legitimacy identity, as it was perceived that the indigenous people should conform in order to succeed in attaining economic development and power. Recognition of their cultural identity was not perceived as a problem, and it was thus not deemed necessary to address the cultural needs of the Guatemalan Mayans.

### **6.3 Focus Group 3 (recorded 15.02.06)**

Focus group 3 consists of four female political science students at the Rafael Landivar University in Guatemala City. The institution prides itself on emphasising Christian and social values. As the university is private, and as the tuition fee is comparatively high, the students are from a rather privileged background. The group was highly interested in the reconstruction of post-conflict Guatemala, and the solution of underlying conflicts marring their society. They viewed these issues as potential causes for re-ignition of violent conflict, and saw the question of indigenous integration and Guatemalan identity as highly relevant.

Two of the participants were in the last year of their four-year course, and two were in their second year. Their ages rank from 20 to 23 years. All of the four women are non-indigenous, and all come from Guatemala City. TV is the medium most commonly used by the groups to obtain news, the newspaper most commonly read is *Prensa Libre*. For detailed information on media usage and ethnic background of focus group 3, please refer to Appendix No. 2.3.

### **Theme 1: The Press in Guatemala**

Focus group 3 briefly pointed to the strong monopolisation of the press. The mass media in general were seen as used by the elites to obtain economic advantages and maintain political power, and as such extremely partisan with elite interests. Communication was seen as 'fundamental' to winning an election. Yet, as the press managed by those in power, "one cannot rely 100 per cent on the press" (min. 10.23).

One participant lamented the gullibility and lack of initiative among the Guatemalan public, which assumes that what if it is in the press, it is true (min.10.42). News from the countryside was seen as underrepresented and not corresponding to ‘the truth’ (min. 24.10-24.22).

Particular criticism was aimed at the two major tabloids, *Al Dia* and *Nuestro Diario*, for their strong focus on sensationalist pictures. The political science students pointed out particularly shocking images, and referred to the use of colours, which underlined the violent nature of the news. An example used by the participants includes the printing of the word ‘kill’ in red in an otherwise black headline and the image of a “policeman beating up a civilian” (Appendix 3.2). These articles, concludes one participant, “give the sentiment that politics in Guatemala do not work. And that influences [the people].” (min.20.00-20.08).

Another participant laments the lack of analysis in the tabloids:

They do not show analysis. They show more visual images which create a certain scandalisation in the society, about topics like the insecurity, about the violence and all that, but they do not present critical analysis. *elPeriodico* has more news articles and analysis, but not everybody can buy it. Or they are not interested in it. (min. 11.34-12.10).

Amid strong agreement in the group with the latter statement, another participant adds: “They are not interested in it. Because everybody buys *Al Dia*.” (min. 12.10-12.12).

Throughout the discussion much attention was given to the lack of awareness of the Guatemalan population, which appeared to be more interested in violent scandals than the country’s political progress. The lack of education and reading skills was not mentioned. Economy, while seen as a potential factor, did not appear to be a valid reason for people to be interested in the current affairs and the political life in Guatemala<sup>64</sup>.

## **Theme 2: Indigenous coverage of the Press**

The group felt that the Peace Accords were not sufficiently covered by the press. If anything, they felt that Guatemalans had to rely on information by international organisations, NGOs or in some cases, the government (min.13.00). Part of the reason given was the fact that the media are centralised, and as capital was not as affected by

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<sup>64</sup> The issue of access is discussed on page 71

the war, the people “do not identify with the war” (min.825). At a later point, the political science students feared that due to this lack of education on, and identification with the war, reasons leading to the war might not be addressed and people might repeat the same mistakes of racial discrimination.

While the group emphasised the impact of negative news coverage on the Guatemalan identity, when questioned about the coverage of indigenous identity by the press, a participant pointed out that there is a difference between the construction of a Guatemalan image and identity, i.e. through violent pictures, and the addressal of an indigenous identity because “the message definitely goes out to a certain group” (min. 21.12) Another participant elaborated:

Well when we are for example talking about these little articles on the weekends about certain social groups, which go to certain places, which have a certain style and social standing, and then come the people of a different ethnic group, and a social status that is lower and they see these articles, they don't identify with it. That is also what is creating this reaction [of racism by indigenous people towards Ladinos]. (min. 21.12-21.34).

While the group agreed that this type of coverage could make indigenous people feel excluded for reasons of their culture, they saw no specific economic exclusion of any ethnic group as poor Ladinos also were also not able to afford to buy newspapers. The students emphasised that although indigenous people in Guatemala are commonly associated with a lower social class, this is not always the case. One participant elaborated: “Also between the ethnic groups are different social classes. [But the difference is that] even if they are from the highest social class, they cannot compete with the elite which runs Guatemala” (min. 22.22-22.36). The press is seen as focusing less on class than on lifestyle based on cultural values.

Press coverage was not seen as racist, but rather as exclusionist. Racism was interpreted as an underlying theme in Guatemalan society. While the press was seen as making no exception in perpetuating discriminatory stereotypes, the group felt that the mass media were careful to avoid providing outright racist coverage.

### **Theme 3: Indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan identity**

When questioned about Guatemalan identity, the participants concluded that ‘Guatemala is different than other nations’. They argued that for historical reasons one Guatemalan identity per se does not exist, but that people identify themselves along

ethnic lines. This split among more than 20 identities is seen to create inherent problems for the country. One woman pointed out that the implications of ethnic identity have been taking on a new hue in recent years. Racial discrimination, potentially leading to violent outbreaks and, in the worst case, a reoccurrence of the civil war was seen as also stemming from Mayan groups.

The situation is that we are a multiethnic country and that is why it is complicated that one feels Guatemalan, because we have discrimination and all that but I feel what is happening now in Guatemala is like the reaction [to the discrimination]. These social movements and social groups, indigenous people of various ethnic groups are reacting and are converting this racism which existed among Ladinos. Now it is them who discriminate. They think that only because of the fact that they are indigenous they should take power. That is the other extreme (min. 14.55- 15.50).

Another participant attributed the lack of Guatemalan identity to the discriminative processes in the press.

But what you were saying about the indigenous people wanting the power and all that... I feel that the press is at the root of all lot of that. The press takes sides with the elites, and portray them as the best and everything. And [the elites] make sure that everything is dependent on them, right? The press takes the side of the business people and not of the employers, this leads to discrimination (min.16.10- )

### **Narratives and arguments focus group 3**

Focus group 3 views the media as a tool for political domination. For this reason, the press can not always be seen as trustworthy, though the group believes that the print media have considerable influence in Guatemala. The participants appeared rather concerned about the absence of political analysis and information in the tabloids. Scandal-mongering and the coverage of violence in the country by the tabloids are interpreted as undermining the efficiency of Guatemalan politics. Orientation towards Western values, reflected by the print media, was seen as a normal and not particularly negative process. However, the group pointed out that due to their difference in culture, indigenous people might feel excluded from the news.

Indigenous people are not viewed as victims, although focus group 3 is aware of the problem of discrimination within Guatemalan society and emphasised that Guatemalan identity orientation happened along ethnic lines. They strongly differentiated between class and ethnic groups. Lack of education or the theme of 'general underdevelopment' was hardly mentioned and never equalled to or even explicitly connected to indigenouness.



Various members emphasised the growing strength and influence of the Mayan movements. At the same time, the participants stressed that nobody should be given power simply because they are Mayan. A theme strongly represented was the growing racism by indigenous people towards Ladinos, or even among various Mayan groups. The sense of exclusion generated by newspaper articles aimed at a Ladino public was interpreted as potentially adding to the hostility by Mayans towards Ladino people. While historic reasons for this perceived aggression remained in the open, structural reasons such as poverty were rejected.

The group appears to view Mayans as a strong force to be reckoned with, yet they view the growing strengths and demands of Mayans with apprehension. The group's reason for the Mayan effort to attain power and resentment of Ladinos is attributed to increased opportunities after the end of the civil war. Consequently, 'they do it because they can'. As political science students, the group was very interested in the political implications of press coverage. The participants showed a clear recognition of the difficult position for indigenous people in Guatemalan society, while at the same time expressing fear that the power structure might be reversed.

The participants' narrative told of the difficult historical legacy Guatemala is facing today. While they perceived old structures as changing, they described the rise of new challenges stemming from the century-old repression of Guatemala's indigenous people. The students' argumentation is based on this historical approach. Change must come from a societal level, aided structural adjustments, which have already begun to be implemented.

The themes I identified for focus group 3 are:

- Guatemalan citizens identify themselves along ethnic lines
- Media discourse in Guatemala is too focused on violent discourse, this promotes a negative image of the country
- Guatemala has a history of discrimination towards its indigenous people, this is changing slowly as the end of the civil war has created better opportunities for indigenous people
- Now the exclusion felt by the indigenous people leads to an increase in racism by those marginalised groups towards Ladinos and among the indigenous groups

- Indigenous people should have a greater say in Guatemalan politics, but at the same time, they should not receive preferential treatment simply because they are indigenous

Focus group 3 can be interpreted as being rooted in a legitimatising tradition of identity, arguing that indigenous people should find their place within the existing system. At the same time however, the eventual construction of a project identity was not mentioned in the discussion. The group did express considerable concern about the rise of resistance identity among indigenous groups, a fact which they perceived as potentially taking the century-old ethnic conflict in Guatemala to a new level.

#### **6.4 Focus group 4 (recorded 15.02.06)**

Focus group 4 consists of four political science students at the Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala City. Francisco Marroquin University is a private institution, and describes itself as business and internationally orientated. The campus in Guatemala City is of an extremely high technical standard, better than many state run European universities. This is reflected in the high tuition fees, which appear to be the highest in Guatemala. Students at the Francisco Marroquin University belong to the country's absolute elite. Most of the participants plan to take a Master abroad upon finishing their studies. The students were extremely responsive to the questions, and proposed a large number of themes. The question of indigenous integration and Guatemalan identity appeared to be of clear relevance for the participants.

The group consist of three male and one female participant. As there is only one female member in the group, I will refrain from referring to the sex when quoting participants. All the students are Ladinos, and all are from Guatemala City. Their ages rank from 20 to 22<sup>65</sup>. TV and the press are the media most commonly used by the groups to obtain news, the newspaper most commonly read is *Prensa Libre*. For detailed information on media usage and ethnic background of focus group 4 please refer to Appendix No. 2.4.

#### **Theme 1: The Press in Guatemala**

Focus group 4 had a sceptical attitude towards the Guatemalan press, as they viewed it as unprofessional and open to manipulation. One participant said:

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<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the notebook on which I had kept records of the participant's level in their four-year course was stolen and the records subsequently lost.

In the last six years the Guatemalan press had a strong contra-critical tradition. There is a lot more space for expression in the press and radio which they use to criticise the state. Unfortunately, not all of the journalists or all the newspapers deliver a responsible and objective journalism. The interest groups continue to [push for their interests] and manipulate the mass media massively (min. 10.20-10.53).

Examples for these interest groups include ex-military and labour organisations as well as indigenous groups<sup>66</sup>. Economic interests were not mentioned. One participant called this control by political interest groups ‘corruption’, and pointed out that the press would omit stories if they were not in favour of the particular political stance of the paper. Another participant added:

They write what they want to, and they defend it by saying that this is freedom of expression, but what is happening is that there is no responsibility on the part of the writers, and there is no true analysis. They just treat the things like they want to see them, [...] but it is just criticism to put the others down. They just criticise, but they do not give solutions, [...] they do not help the others they just put the people down. (min 12.27-12.44)

‘A lack of focus on solutions’ by the Guatemalan press was a theme consistently mentioned in the discussion. The political science students particularly lamented the lack of analysis and the lack of constructive rather than ‘destructive’ criticism. Many of the group’s comments can be interpreted as expressing sympathy towards the government and state institutions.

To me the press in Guatemala has a very irresponsible role. They take the point of view which is against the government. They attack, criticise and destroy the government and they do not take the consequences of their actions into account. They do not follow fixed criteria, criteria which they defend acting responsibly, but they just attack and attack what [the government] is doing wrong. That goes down well in the population, while they at the same time misinform the population (min. 12.44-13.19)

## **Theme 2: Indigenous coverage of the Press**

One of the cases of misinformation mentioned above, according to another participant, is the media coverage of the civil war. He speaks of ‘manipulation’ through the mass media and explains:

In truth there was no armed conflict that was all the Ladinos versus all the indigenous people. The truth is that who were killing the indigenous people were indigenous people, it wasn’t like a common cause of the Ladino versus the indigenous population. And now I feel like that the communication media with [their focus on] indigenous

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<sup>66</sup> Yet, the group points to a lack of unity among indigenous people at a later point. Participants argue that one of the Mayan problems is that the different groups are not united and pressing for a common cause.

rights and all that are reinterpreting the conflict. Like it was something against the indigenous people and that the indigenous people were maltreated and all that. (min. 22.44-23.27)

When questioned on the influence of the press on multi-ethnic relations in Guatemala, one student responded:

[The press] spread a way of thinking. They spread this attitude that ones are indigenous we others are Ladinos. Therefore... They mark the difference. They do not view it as one people. The sense of nationalism in Mexico for example is impressive. And they have indigenous people and mestizos. But the difference isn't as marked because their communication media say: 'We are Mexico. We all are Mexico, we all form it, we all work for it.' In contrary, for example the current movement of Guatemala, this public campaign that we all are Guatemalans... That are things have not always been going on. It is not the first time that this happens, but they last for a very short time, they are very sporadic, there is no consistency in which they bombard people with 'We are Guatemalans, we have an identity, we are one resolution and decision.' (min.21.39 - 22.41)

The strong centralisation of the Guatemalan press serves to further this chasm, according one participant.

This type of discourse could may be seen as a sentiment of superiority in the sense that, well its is a press with news from the other counties, but there is not really a newspaper where the departamientos can put out their opinion like in the newspapers from the capital. This also means that when they publish articles on the departamientos, or show news on television, it is like, well, we are this and you *are* those from the departamientos, you *are* from the interior,. It is like a form of discrimination or something which reflects a certain way of thinking, a certain superiority, because we are from the capital, and that is Guatemala, and you guys are the rest. [The newspapers] can therefore be interpreted along those lines (min. 25.43-25.49)

The focus on negative images rather than constructive criticism was also lamented regarding the coverage of indigenous issues. In regards to the article 'Huipiles en peligro' (National costumes endangered), a participant pointed out:

I think that in these kinds of articles indigenous seem to be like children who have to be cared for, educated and guided so that they can do things better. If I was indigenous and I would read this article I would feel like a victim, I would feel stupid and I would feel... dependent. It is like they are saying that is the way things are, and I cannot change it. And this makes me feel bad, right? It would be something else if they would write that the ladies who are weaving in Alta Verapaz are organising themselves and now they are exporting their huipiles [traditional clothes]. 'Ah! This is a reason to be proud of! I too am from Alta Verapaz!' You know what I mean? This [article] doe not reflect reality... Well, it is true but it does not help. This is the same reality that makes the people think: I am indigenous, I am not proud of that (min. 35.30 - 36.41).

Indigenous people are seen as marginalised: “These types of articles do not help, they just denounce and reinforce dependence” (30.27-30.34). Another participant concluded: “We feel sorry for them” (min. 31.33).

This is a sympathy that, according to the group, the indigenous people do not necessarily deserve, as they may not have it any worse than other people living in rural areas. The group viewed indigenous people as to some degree dependent on aid, and concluded that this type of coverage only increases their dependency. According to the students, it is not only up to the government to provide solutions, as financial aid alone does not help. Instead they pointed out that all people have to work to be successful. Members lamented that there was too much focus on ‘throwing money at the problem’, and one participant expressed concern as interest groups would perceive money as ‘a magic spell’ (min. 6.06-6.08).

Nonetheless, the members agreed that the newspapers’ cultural focus does not reflect the sentiments of indigenous people, leaving indigenous stances severely underrepresented.

### **Theme 3: Indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan identity**

The group consistently maintained that the country is greatly divided. This was seen as part of the reason why the Peace Process had so far not been very successful. After the civil war, many would prefer “to forget the rather than to find solutions to the problems” (min. 1.00-1.31). The strong tendency of centralisation in the country amplifies this attitude. One participant elaborated:

After more than 30 years of internal war the country has deteriorated very much. It is very divided, there is a great disunion between all the Guatemalan communities. Therefore there is no common goal for all the people, many people have different aspects, and of course the ones that feel most strongly about are the ones that have suffered the most. For example, here in the capital, well, we can feel the insecurity for example, but many people don’t even want to know that there was an armed conflict and when they signed the Peace Accords, the people were asking ‘Peace of what? We are not having a war.’ That is because a lot of people in the capital did not feel it, because all the conflicts happened in the interior, like we said, they were happening in the mountains, or in different places and here in the capital you could not feel it and that is why. Yes, a lot of people got to feel the consequences, they are the people who are asking for justice for example, but the people who, well in reality the capital is where all the power is, [and the people here] feel indifferent. They are insensitive towards this conflict. (min. 3.23 -4.40)

Solutions to the problem are often seen as quite inappropriate, imposed by those who do not truly understand the complex reality of post-civil war Guatemala. Highly politicised interest groups are seen to have taken over the Peace Accords. Many of these groups are seen to have pure financial interests at their core.

While much of the sentiment in society has not changed as problems are hidden, a participant pointed out that the participation of indigenous people in all levels of society has increased significantly. The problem, as she perceives it, is that the indigenous people often act through interest groups. The group pointed out the indigenous people lack a communal sense, as they are so split among themselves, and concluded: “We lack a sense of nationality” (min.19.32).

Tribalism appeared to be a re-occurring theme in the discussion with the focus group, as indigenous identity is seen to be operating along fixed ethnic lines defined by the groups’ locality. To the participants, social class does not appear to coincide with these ethnic lines, though people from the interior are seen to suffer from a lack of education. This is not only due to a lack of funding, as one participant pointed out, as millions of dollars have been invested in the education of Guatemala’s interior population, but mainly due to the prevailing sense of ‘the local’ by the indigenous groups, who continue to define themselves along their tribal lines rather than seeing themselves as part of a bigger, national picture.

The different (Mayan) groups are split among themselves, the students argue, yet they can refer to a common heritage: This however might not necessarily be Mayan, as the group believes that many of those traditions thought to be Mayan were in fact introduced by European settlers or that some of the indigenous groups claiming to be of Mayan descent are in fact ‘other indigenous people’. This reflects a common sentiment in Guatemalan society, which appears to admire classical Mayans on the one hand, and see today’s indigenous people non-related to this classical culture on the other.

Being indigenous is thereby seen to carry negative connotations:

Ladino can be anything other than indigenous. They feel proud of the classic Mayans, and [say] ‘Yes, we are Mayans, or well, in Guatemala the Mayans culture was born which was the biggest of America, but I am not an Indian or I am not indigenous’[...] One does not want to be indigenous. (min 17.49 – 18..38)

Although the fixed ethnic identity which indigenous groups appear to carry is not seen to be a positive thing, this does not only work to their disadvantage, as they are at least seen to be provided with a clear orientation. Ladino identity, on the other hand, appears to be something rather blurry, always seeking to orientate itself on its foreign roots, rather than being of value in itself. A participant elaborated:

[The identity] of Ladinos is even more complicated than the one of the indigenous people because the indigenous people have their sense of community, of ethnic group. The Ladinos, on the other hand, they are like 'I am born here and my Grandfather is Spanish, and my Grandmother has Swedish ancestors'. We are always looking for a connection with foreigners. It is not very often that people say: I am born here, I am from here and my family are Guatemalans. (min.16.48-17.12)

The political science students concluded that the lack of own identity and consequent orientation towards foreign values is emphasised by the fact that Guatemala has always been dependent on other nations. Guatemalan identity per se was not seen as a reason to feel proud, or to unite all Guatemalans.

#### **Narratives and arguments focus group 4**

Focus group 4 viewed the Guatemalan press as partisan, irresponsible and potentially damaging to Guatemalan politics. Manipulation caused by ownership concentration was not mentioned; instead the news coverage was seen to be directed by certain political interest groups. The group consistently maintained that the press was overly critical towards all government actions just for the sake of criticism, rather than voicing constructive opinions in a public debate, and thus expressed sympathy for the difficult position of government and state institutions.

The group employed two basic themes related to the coverage of indigenous issues by the Guatemalan press: Firstly, they viewed the press as furthering the chasm between the ethnic groups in Guatemala. One participant lamented that the press manufactured problems by trying to lay blame on Ladinos in general, thus making the civil war an ethnic conflict, which in his opinion was clearly not the case. On the other hand, members of the groups felt that Guatemalan news coverage had patronising connotations, consequently portraying indigenous people as 'victims to be felt sorry for'. A certain superiority stemming from the country's centralist tradition was seen as reinforcing indigenous dependence on state aid, rather than encouraging indigenous pride and self-sufficiency.

Focus group 4 can be interpreted as taking a neoliberal stance towards development. Members criticised the interests groups' focus on financial aid. In the group's views, a successful development project requires self-respect and work for a common project. Financial aid for indigenous people was seen as reinforcing dependency and underdevelopment. The students made no mention of a connection between class and ethnicity, yet they saw a strong divide between those Guatemalans who live in the capital and those who live in the interior as well as the different ethnic groups themselves.

The political science students represent Guatemala's absolute elite, and this privileged position was visible throughout their argumentation. Their narrative tells of a country, which due to tribal structures, internal disunity and even greed has difficulty to implement a neoliberalist national project that will lead to successful development. In their argumentation, the group speaks of the necessity for outside groups to adapt within the existing system. Problems are seen to come from a societal, even individual level. The themes I identified for group 4 are:

- The press portrays indigenous people as victims, and unjustly so
- Guatemalan centralisation emphasises a split between the capital and everything outside the capital
- This leads to an inappropriate treatment of the country's political issues, such as the implementation of the Peace Accords or development
- Indigenous people are portrayed as victims, weak and unable to change their position, or 'to be felt sorry for'
- This reinforces their dependency on aid, seen as an inappropriate measure to create development
- The Guatemalan society is split along ethnic lines
- While having an indigenous identity has negative connotations, Ladino identity too is a difficult, blurry project, mainly orientating itself among foreign rather than Guatemalan values

The group did not take a position which can be interpreted as purely sympathetic with the cause of indigenous rights. In accordance with Castell's theory on identity formation, the group's position can be interpreted as arguing from a legitimatising perspective, but interestingly they define themselves, Ladinos, as 'anything but'. The addressal of grievances by fractions of Guatemalan society is seen in the light of this



legitimatising identity. Solutions are inevitably seen to lie within the current system, rather than a more radical shift in the power structures, as would be proposed by the construction of a project identity.

At the same time the students acknowledge problems stemming from the country's strong centralist tradition, which has left indigenous and rural people, and those particularly affected by the civil war (who according to the group, are not the same necessarily categories) feeling marginalised and forgotten. This could lead to the slow formation of a resistance identity from the side of the excluded. The press is seen to aid this process, by furthering division in Guatemalan society.

### **6.5 Focus group 5 (recorded 17. 02. 2006)**

Throughout my research, I tried to guarantee full anonymity for all focus group participants. As the members of the group would be easily identifiable due to their profession, I agreed with the participants that the name of the organisation they work for would not be published. It is a major institution in Quetzaltenango, funded by the international community and working with development for indigenous people in the Guatemalan highlands. The six participants of the groups are all working professionals, with all but one having a university degree, three at Master's level. As some of the indigenous members at Master's level, they are representing the country's indigenous elite (at least in terms of formal education). During the discussion, the development workers proved to be very responsive, at times even engaging in parallel conversations about particular points, which made the recording occasionally a little unclear. The question of indigenous integration and Guatemalan identity appeared to be of clear relevance to the participants, and the group adopts a viewpoint that can be described as strongly in favour of affirmative action on behalf of indigenous rights.

The group consisted of four women and two men, and three of the participants are indigenous. Three of the participants come from a rural background, the remaining three come from a big city. The development workers' ages range from 32 to 57. TV and the press are the media most commonly utilized by the groups to obtain news, the newspaper most commonly read is *Prensa Libre*. For detailed media usage and ethnic background information of focus group 4 please refer to Appendix No. 2.5.

## Theme 1: The Press in Guatemala

Focus group 5 argued that the Guatemalan press is big business, with economic interests at its heart, rather than a tool to inform citizens in a working democracy (min. 0.59 – 1.33). The monopoly of the press leads to a strong centralisation of news, while economic dependency leads to a lack of quality reporting in all the newspapers affiliated with the big news cooperation, such as *El Quetzalteco*, the regional newspaper for Quetzaltenango, which belongs to the Prensa Libre group. However, local newspapers outside the main conglomerates were described as capable of producing better quality journalism, though no example was mentioned by the group (min.3.35-4.41).

Members of the group lamented that the press in general would not focus on positive aspects of news. Particularly where news of development in the interior was concerned, newspapers were seen as preferring sensationalist coverage to news on rural progress. Guatemalan newspapers were described as portraying conflicts as separate violent occurrences on a day-to-day level rather than social conflicts. Methods employed when reporting the civil war, focusing on distinctive actors, rather than the everyday life of the vast majority of the Guatemalan people, are still in place, creating a false and simplified impression of two competing groups, i.e. the Maras (violent gangs) against the police and do not mirror social complexity (min. 6.00-6.36). The news was thus seen as lacking in-depth and analysis, making coverage of the peace process insufficient (min.0.39-1.51) The development workers criticised the strong focus on violent images in the Guatemalan press, which were perceived as ‘too strong’. Particularly the tabloid *Nuestro Diario* was seen as aiding to create a ‘culture of violence’, and demoralising Guatemalan society.

Yet the development workers emphasised that it is not solely the press which can be blamed for this type of coverage; the public was also held responsible. A female participant pointed out: “The public likes to see blood” (min.7.16).

Some members of the group also attributed much of the lack of quality journalism on the lack of journalistic etiquette among individuals, who rather than aiming to achieve journalistic ideals, see themselves as employees of a business organisation (0.59 – 1.33). Their negligence is emphasised by a ‘culture of fear’, a legacy from the years of

the civil war, which implies that all the news has to be read ‘between the lines’ in order to find out what they really have to say (min.2.36-3.35).

Yet one development worker praised the few individual reporters, who went out of their way to deliver a picture that aided the peace processes in Guatemala.

Nevertheless, I would like to say something that I find very important in relation to the press. I personally I like those articles very much which are empowering development in our country, the culture, the identity. There are a lot journalists which really are writing in favour of [development, culture and identity]. This helps us a lot, and I see these journalists as positive examples (min. 8.20 – 8.49).

One notable exception praised by the group is Sam Colop, a Mayan columnist at Prensa Libre. Yet, one member lamented that there are relatively few indigenous journalists working in the Guatemalan press, and even fewer who identify themselves as indigenous. Some of these journalists were even seen to discriminate against their own ethnic groups (min. 9.00-10.05).

## **Theme 2: Indigenous coverage of the Press**

Regarding the coverage of indigenous issues by Guatemalan newspapers, the group agreed that stories concerning Mayans were used in folkloristic manner. A mestizo woman pointed out: There are two groups which are discriminated against: the indigenous people who are used for tourism, and the women who are treated as ‘sex objects’ (min.10.05-10.31). Another development worker argued: “I think that in the newspapers and in the news, yes they are promoting indigenous people, but in a cultural sense, tourism more than anything. There is no recognition of the reality which the indigenous people live” (min.19.51-20.12). This appeared to be confirmed by the group, which saw no need for further discussion on the subject.

## **Theme 3: Indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan identity**

The construction of identity among ethnic lines runs deep, explained one development worker. He sees Guatemala as being extremely ethnocentric. He argues that from the state to the cultural level, Guatemalans are supposed to identify with Ladino values, at the same time “excluding and ignoring ethnic diversity in Guatemala” (min. 23.30-23.31).

The group referred to the positive effects of the cultural revaluation of the different Mayan groups. At the same time, participants pointed out that although few Mayans change their identity for reasons of fear, as happened in the times of the civil war, there are many who change for economic reasons or as a response to social pressure. An indigenous participant elaborated: “But we also have to be realists in that there are a lot of fellow Mayans who have also lost their own identity. [...] Names, for example. Instead of the [Mayan] surname Luj, they write Lux” (min. 30.1-30.27). She referred to Mayans changing their identity when they enter higher education, or when they want to change their social position. Another participant pointed out that the Guatemalan registration system would at times register indigenous people as Ladinos based on racial stereotypes or surnames.

At the same time as indigenous groups are reaffirming themselves, they are striving for their place in a new all-inclusive Guatemalan identity. Ideally, one indigenous development worker pointed out, indigenous people should be in a position to see themselves as equal members of society, while at the same time reaffirming and valuing their differences. Though progress has been made in the achievement of this new identity, and much of the Guatemalan intellectual discourse is aimed at creating an image of a truly multicultural, plurilingual and multiethnic Guatemalan identity, this was described as “utopian” (min.13.11).

One indigenous participant went as far as arguing that these reaffirmations of identity are an intellectual stillbirth as there is no real intention for implementing these measures for Guatemalan society.

I agree with what my colleagues have said in that there is a rebirth of identity among the different linguistic groups. Well it is not the majority, but if the people are reaffirming themselves, and if they are really looking for a construction of, as we say, the nation... At the same time, there are still many things reoccurring [...]. The basic problem is located at different levels, right? At the governmental level, or even the state itself. There is no real political will that these processes will really continue. I think that there are a lot of programmes, a lot projects which are going along those lines, there is a lot of strength, a lot of financial aid... But a lot of the times, this is just a discourse, it is just to keep these people in jobs, but in reality it does not interest them to actually reach their goal, to construct this identity. I see this is a fundamental problem (min. 15.29 -16.48).

Other challenges for the indigenous groups are seen to stem from the disunity between the different ethnic groups as well as the lack of a leading figure, a political leader, or ‘driver’ who will lead the fight for the construction of an identity (min.16.49 – 17.46).

### **Narratives and arguments focus group 5**

Focus group 5 views the Guatemalan press as a cynical business enterprise, seemingly more concerned with increasing profits through sensationalist coverage fulfilling the public’s short-term curiosity, than contributing positively to democracy and development in the country. At the same, the efforts of individual journalists were praised, underlining the point that other types of coverage are indeed possible. Indigenous people are seen to be almost exclusively mentioned in connection with folklore, mainly for tourism purposes. This can be interpreted as making it difficult for Mayans to be a significant actor in Guatemalan politics.

Participants saw the Guatemalan society as ethnocentric. Structural disadvantages were seen as stemming from these ethnic divisions. On the other hand, the group pointed out that identity in Guatemala has changed since the war, as ethnic groups have begun to reaffirm themselves while at the same time striving for their place in a new all-inclusive Guatemalan identity. Yet, as the divisions between the ethnic groups are seen to run deep on all levels, the formation of an all-inclusive Guatemalan identity is seen as unattainable due to lack of true interest and political will. In addition, the different indigenous groups are seen to be disunited, and lack a strong common leader pushing for indigenous advancement in society a fact seen to create further obstacles.

The group argued from a strong indigenous standpoint, with even its Ladino members proudly and strongly referring to their Mayan cultural heritage and world vision. Interestingly as the participants professionally deal with poverty eradication, the theme of poverty or underdevelopment in specific connection to indigenousness was not a prevalent theme throughout the discussion, as the development workers eagerly engaged in the theme of cultural discrimination. The group’s narrative focused on the deep running cultural discrimination in the Guatemalan society, which would slowly eradicate Mayan identity. At the same time the group told of indigenous reaffirmation, and a slow change in the state’s formerly racist structure. However,

attempts to create a new, all-inclusive and egalitarian Guatemala were doomed to failure. The group's argumentation pointed to problems on the societal level, such as a lack of political will on the one hand, and the idea that Mayans themselves want to adopt Ladino identity to better their social position on the other.

The themes suggested by focus group 5 are:

- Business interests prevent Guatemala from having a truly democratic nature, this is mirrored in media ownership and discourse
- Violent discourse in the media helps to create a violent culture in Guatemala
- Mayan images are used in a folkloristic manner
- Indigenous people are continuing to adapt their identity to Ladino values. This partly due to economic reasons or societal pressure, partly due to force by the state or for reasons of fear have stopped since the end of the civil war

The development workers appeared to be rather disillusioned with the advancement of the Mayan position in Guatemalan society. Even though strong hopes for the transformation of Guatemalan identity along the lines of a project identity were expressed, members saw it necessary to place themselves within a resistance identity to combat the every day life of Guatemalan politics and society where a normalising legitimatising identity prevailed. Resistance identity thus stems from a threat to the various cultures of the country's indigenous people.

## Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

### 7.1 Comparison of the focus groups

For reasons of clarity, I am providing a short summary of the super themes suggested by all focus groups in the following categories: The press in Guatemala; Coverage of indigenous people; Indigenous identity; Ladino Identity; and Guatemalan identity. The results of this short discussion and comparison of the five focus groups point to a number of super themes. Some of these are wildly differing according to the social and ethnic background of the participants, yet a number of super themes are reflected in the discussion of all groups, though due to their socio-cultural differences very different reasons are given.

#### Guatemalan press:

*Focus group 1:* Ownership problems; focus on violent news; influences people to think in a negative manner; media is centralist and excludes indigenous people

*Focus group 2:* Manipulation due to ownership problems, as media owners are the powerful elite; lack of journalistic freedom due to repressions

*Focus group 3:* The media is managed by the elites; strong focus on violence; focus on sensationalism rather than analysis; media seen as strongly centralist and not identifying with the rural areas and the civil war

*Focus group 4:* Press criticises the government for the sake of criticism and focuses on negative images of Guatemalan politics thus undermining the efficiency of the state; media are manipulated by interest groups; media is centralist and excluding

*Focus group 5:* Press is a business with economic rather than 'fourth estate' interests at its heart; news seen as centralised and focused on sensationalist violence; simplified conflicts ignores underlying social problems by focusing on day-to-day violence. Media is centralist and excluding; however there are some individual journalists working in favour of development and culture

Attitudes expressed by the groups towards the Guatemalan print media had almost exclusively negative connotations, though reasons varied in accordance with the socio-economic and cultural-ethnic status of the groups. However, focus group 5 did point out the courage and professionalism of individual journalists writing in favour of development and multiculturalism.

Disproportionate influence by the country's political and economic elite, who also own and manage the media, is given as the main reason for the grave problems facing the quality of the Guatemalan press. Notably however, members of focus group 4, who are representing the country's elite, spoke of a contra-critical tradition of the press, thus reversing the argument by pointing out the disproportionate influence of the various interest groups while ignoring the issue of ownership and control.

Every group did lament the media's strong focus on negative issues, such as violence and the failure of politics, and the lack of 'serious' reporting, albeit for different reasons. While group 1, mostly consisting of Mayans, spoke of exploitative and downgrading news coverage, group 4, representing the elite, expressed sympathy as the government was being unfairly attacked. Group 2, the journalism students, spoke of the dangers for journalists, while group 3, the political science students, viewed the press as a tool for political domination.

Centralisation and the consequent exclusion of the rest of the country was another super theme mentioned frequently. This was unanimously seen as leading to the exclusion of the rest of the country, especially the rural areas. While the groups agreed that this exclusion hit all the citizens living outside the capital, focus groups 1, 3, 4 and 5 detected a specific cultural exclusion of indigenous people. As focus group 2 views indigenous people as defined by class rather than culture, and persisted that indigenous people are in general illiterate, they saw no such connection, as this makes newspapers superfluous for indigenous people in any case.

#### Indigenous coverage:

*Focus group 1:* Indigenous people are excluded from press coverage due to the centralist tradition and indigenous illiteracy; feeling of marginalisation; Mayan images are seen as exploited; media images undermine indigenous identity

*Focus group 2:* Indigenous issues not covered due to indigenous illiteracy, issues of indigenous inclusion and the implementation of the Peace Accords are of much higher concern for the indigenous people than for non-indigenous people and consequently not covered by the newspapers. This is understandable and no cause for concern

*Focus group 3:* Exclusionist coverage by the press strengthens indigenous resentment of elites and the ladino ethnic group

*Focus group 4:* Coverage of the civil war highlights indigenous problems too strongly, thus falsifying history; the press is marking ethnic differences thus aiding ethnic division in the



country; centralisation aids the chasm between the interior and the capital; articles on indigenous people victimise them thus reinforcing their dependency on state aid

*Focus group 5:* Indigenous groups are discriminated against and only covered by the news for folkloristic or tourism purposes; media images undermine indigenous identity

Focus group 1, 3, 4 and 5 pointed out the negative effects of centralisation by the Guatemalan press as particularly affecting indigenous people. This was seen as leading to a sense of marginalisation, and in the case of focus group 1 and 3, frustration. This was of much less concern to focus group 2, as they did not consider indigenous people as a significant target audience for the press. Interestingly, to focus group 4, the press was emphasising ethnic differences, which stands in polar opposite to ideas suggested by groups 1 and 3 and not mentioned by groups 2 and 5.

Focus group 4 was also the only group to assert that the problems indigenous people were faced in the civil war are exaggerated by the Guatemalan press. The group did however make a similar point to group 1 and 5 when stating that indigenous people were portrayed as victims in the media. Yet again, focus group 4 is the only group to emphasise indigenous dependency on state aid. Both groups representing university students from the capital however spoke about exaggerated claims on the part of the indigenous people. These are financial demands in the case of focus group 4 and claims for power in the case of focus group 3. Group 1 and 5, the two focus groups mostly consisting of indigenous members and most sympathetic to the indigenous cause, pointed to the use and misuse of Mayan images for folkloristic and tourism purposes.

#### Indigenous Identity:

*Focus group 1:* Associated with social class, but also strong underlining various cultures such as traditional ways of dress etc.; indigenous identity carries negative connotations and is no reason to be proud

*Focus group 2:* Indigenous identity equals low social class; identity defined by class; for successful development indigenous people have to adjust to Ladino values

*Focus group 3:* Increased formation of indigenous identity among ethnic-linguistic lines, including the formation of contra-racism towards Ladinos and among the various indigenous ethnicities; Identity interpreted along ethnic-cultural lines

*Focus group 4:* Identity seen along cultural, ethnic-linguistic and tribal lines; indigenous identity is seen to carry negative connotations

*Focus group 5:* Mayans are losing their identity, both to gain social acceptability and through state manipulation. On the other hand, indigenous groups are reaffirming their identity and culture

The definition of indigenusness appeared to be a key question in all discussions. While focus group 2, and to a much lesser degree group 1, drew on the theme of class, focus groups 3 and 4 emphasised ethnicity and linguistic groupings. Culture was another theme employed to describe what makes a person indigenous. Both groups 3 and 4 refer to Mayan culture, though to a much lesser degree than groups 1 and 5. To focus group 2 however indigenusness was firmly rooted in belonging to the rural, poor and uneducated part of the Guatemalan population.

All groups agreed that indigenusness bears negative connotations. Focus group 2 equals being indigenous with being underdeveloped and poor, and suggests a transformation of identity in order to achieve economic development. Groups 1, 3, 4 and 5 pointed out that in Guatemala, being indigenous is no reason to be proud. Something one is not proud of can easily be interpreted as something one is in fact ashamed of. While for focus group 1 and 5, the groups mostly representing Mayans, the negation of Mayan identity was seen to bring advantages in their social standing, focus group 4 was less explicit by simply pointing out that ‘one does not want to be indigenous’. Both group 1 and 5 expressed fears of indigenous identity being lost.

Focus group 3 pointed out the heritage of racism in the country, but emphasised that this is in fact changing. Group 3 and 5 emphasised the reaffirmation of indigenous identity, yet while the group was concerned that this reaffirmation might go too far and turn into racism by indigenous people towards Ladinos, group 5 saw the affirmation as a process still not implemented enough.

#### Ladino Identity:

*Focus group 1:* Ladino identity is falsely perceived as more valuable, it is the dominant group in Guatemala

*Focus group 2:* Ladino identity aligns itself with western values and is developed and modern. As indigenous people are seen as a minority, Ladino is dominant.

*Focus group 3:* Historically Ladinos representing Western values were the dominant and more powerful group, which acted in a racist manner towards Guatemala's indigenous people. Both are in the process of change

*Focus group 4:* Guatemalan Ladinos are seen to orientate themselves almost exclusively on foreign, Western values thus pointing to a certain insecurity regarding their Guatemalan identity. Ladinos, especially those from the capital, are in a position of high control

*Focus group 5:* Ladino identity is dominant both at state and cultural level, imposing foreign values and ignoring the country's own cultural diversity

All groups perceived Ladinos to be the dominant group in the country. Groups 1, 3 and 5 pointed to historical reasons. The participants argued that power should be shared between all ethnic groups, though group 3 was notably more reserved than group 1 and 5. Focus group 2's view can be interpreted as seeing this dominance as a positive thing which aids the development of the country, while at the same time expressing fears that Western and Mexican influences are getting too strong, thus weakening and dissolving Ladino identity, which the participants appear to be using synonymously with Guatemalan identity. Focus group 4 also pointed to Western influences and described their difficulties when defining Ladino identity, seen always depending on foreign influences and noting the consequent insecurity this identity entails.

#### Guatemalan Identity:

*Focus group 1:* Guatemalan identity is made up of a number of ethnicities and ideally Guatemalan society should represent its pluricultural and multiethnic nature. For success in Guatemalan society however, it is better to negate one's cultural differences and adjust to mainstream Ladino values

*Focus group 2:* The national identity is seen to be represented by Ladino values and culture, Guatemalan identity thus aligns itself with western values and culture

*Focus group 3:* Guatemalan identity per se does not exist, as the national identity is seen to be split among ethnic lines; racist culture has to change to overcome conflict and some representation of indigenous people is necessary

*Focus group 4:* Guatemala is deeply divided along ethnic lines, making the construction of national identity for all a near impossibility

*Focus group 5:* Identity is ethnocentric and evolves around the dominant Ladino identity; though ideally the national identity should be multicultural, plurilingual and multiethnic, this however is utopian due to a lack of political will at a state and societal level

The discussion of groups 1, 2, 3 and 5 pointed to the underlying themes that at the time of conversation, Guatemalan identity was seen to be constructed mainly along the lines of Ladino cultural identity. However, all but focus group 2 emphasised that Guatemala is made up by a number of ethnicities. A theme underlining all the discussions but most clearly expressed by focus group 3 is that there is no Guatemalan identity per se. Groups 1, 3, 4 and 5 expressed hopes for the construction of a Guatemalan citizenship, though this was deemed as highly unlikely by groups 1, 4 and 5. Reasons for this lie in the strong tribal orientation of the various indigenous groups for group 3 (this was also a cause for concern for group 4, though participants did not view the situation as detrimental), and the prevailing culture of discrimination for groups 1 and 5.

Focus groups 1, 3 and 5 pointed to prevailing problems of discrimination within the Guatemalan society, though group 1 and 5 more explicitly so. To both these groups, the implementation of such an all-inclusive identity remains a utopia. Group 1, 2 and 4 spoke of the orientation towards foreign values as a cause of concern for fear of losing indigenous identity or Guatemalan-ladino identity respectively.

Though all of the 27 participants had a privileged status in Guatemala, narratives and argumentation employed mirrored their socio-economic and cultural differences. Group 1, mostly consisting of indigenous people who attended university on the basis of scholarships, and worked as peace promoters in indigenous communities, spoke of their frustration of being excluded. Group 2, the (mainly) ladino journalism students from the interior part of the country, spoke of the lack development in Guatemala. Group 3, the political science students in the capital, expressed fears of a rising anti-Ladino stance as the indigenous groups are beginning to seize power. Group 4, speaking from the economically comfortable position of representing Guatemala's elite, saw the government as attacked unfairly and felt that the large amounts of aid given to indigenous communities would reinforce dependence. Group 5, the development workers, acknowledged the effects of their work when describing positive changes in the Guatemalan society. At the same time, the group expressed resignation calling a truly egalitarian and multicultural society utopia.

## 7.2 Concluding remarks

As I mentioned in the methodology chapter this case study seeks to answer three questions based on theories of media and the formation of identity, Castell's proposal on identity formation and the Human Needs theory for conflict resolution.

- How are the three different identities (indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan) represented by the Guatemalan press?
- What type of identity is being promoted by this press coverage?
- How does this type of identity affect the human needs, and consequently the overcoming of conflict in Guatemala?

How are the three different identities (indigenous, Ladino and Guatemalan) represented by the Guatemalan press?

According to the ritual view proposed by Carey, communication takes on the function of maintaining society, by producing, transforming, repairing and transforming its reality (Carey: 1989). Society is seen to be structured along its cultural system (Rosengren: 1994). Culture is seen as "the process of meaning-making within a given social group" (Lewis: 2002:3). The mass media, as one significant representative of culture can thus shape society's values, sentiments and attitudes, the very process of meaning-making itself: society's collective identities (Carey: 1989; Castells: 1997). It thus has the possibility to build communities across society (Anderson: 1993), however in the case of minorities the media can also increase chasms between different groups (Gross:1998).

In the case of Guatemala, the identities highlighted in regards to indigenous, Ladino and the national identity as a whole appear to fall into the latter category. Ladino identity was portrayed as the dominant identity, reflecting their dominant position in society. Guatemalan identity was either seen not to exist at all in the sense of a cultural community, or to reflect Ladino sentiments. Participants saw indigenous people portrayed in a manner that emphasises negative connotations or indigenous identity ignored, thus furthering chasms in the society and the feeling of exclusion. Throughout the discussions the participants drew on the theme of media influence in the shaping of their community.

What type of identity is being promoted by this press coverage?

Manuel Castells proposes three types of collective identities: Legitimizing, resistance and project identity representing the identity of those in power to rationalise their domination, those who are excluded and who wish to mark their group belonging as different from their oppressor, thus excluding the excluders, and the construction of a new identity which seeks to redefine society's social structure towards an all inclusive project respectively (1997).

Identity formation in Guatemala can be seen to have taken place along the lines of legitimising and resistance identity. Ladinos, the dominant group in the country, argue from the viewpoint of legitimising identity. According to their line of reasoning, indigenous groups are to negotiate their space within the existing system, thus cementing the logic of their domination. Indigenous people on the other hand, are seen to have either conformed to the role imposed by their perceived oppressors, or have taken on a resistance identity, seeking to affirm themselves by emphasising their cultural differences, while at the same time acknowledging their own position as marginalised and excluded. Participants expressed hopes for the construction of an all-inclusive Guatemalan project identity, yet this was seen as unlikely by the participants due to differences within the indigenous groups and the prevailing structure of cultural discrimination in the Guatemalan society.

How does this type of identity affect the human needs, and consequently the overcoming of conflict in Guatemala?

The continuous deprivation of fundamental human needs lie at the core of protracted social conflict. Azar suggests three types of human needs: Acceptance needs, security needs and access needs (1990). Identity - the right to be what I am - and recognition - the status of being a full partner in social interaction - are common threads throughout the history of Guatemala. The denial of these acceptance needs for Guatemala's indigenous people, both as historical legacy and in ten years after the Peace Accords have made the addressal of acceptance a relevant issue to be addressed for attempts at comprehensive conflict resolution in the country's post-civil war society.

The two identities displayed by the participants do not address the human need for acceptance, and thus neglect a root cause of the conflict in Guatemala. A

legitimatising identity will not address the acceptance needs as it justifies Ladino domination of the cultural system, thus forcing Guatemala's indigenous people to either negate their own cultural system and to adapt to a Ladino value system, or to adopt a resistance identity as they feel that they are suffering from a lack of recognition. Resistance identity affirms their cultural value system, however, it stems from a position of marginalisation, and increases the spiral of exclusion in Guatemala further as the indigenous groups are beginning to exclude Ladinos and other indigenous groups. Participants voiced their wish for a project identity, which was seen to address underlying conflicts in the Guatemalan society, yet expressed strong reservations regarding the implementation of this all-inclusive identity.

As I pointed out earlier, cultural needs are just one link in the complex set of causal chains regarding the addressal of human needs for a comprehensive project a conflict resolution in a post-civil war society. Equally, the findings are based on opinions expressed by the 27 participants of my study, and are thus limited in number and scope. The theories employed in my study were chosen for their relevance to my research question, hence because they pointed to a different aspect in the complex web of conflict resolution mechanisms. Different theoretical approaches would have highlighted other aspects. Would they have come to the same conclusion regarding the integration of Mayan groups and the formation of collective identities? Among my focus groups, my findings have been persistent. However, I believe my study would have benefited from a longer research period and extended stay in the country, as well as the participation of more indigenous people. As little research has been undertaken the media influence towards the formation of identities in a post-conflict environment, further research in the field will be required, yet I am hoping my thesis can be a small exploratory step in an interesting direction.

I also would find it of interest to eventually explore the relations between the different Mayan groups. In the presentation of indigenous identity, relative power and size of the groups could provide reason for further conflicts, as each group should be able to identify itself along the lines of its cultural peculiarities, and receive recognition for the expression of its diversity. As Guatemala is marked by illiteracy, a study of radio and TV content could prove to be useful. Alternatively, the study could be repeated once illiteracy rates have been reduced significantly.

The formal end of the civil war laid a variety of opportunities and demands upon Guatemala. When looking at the press discourse reflected through the eyes of my participants, Guatemala has not yet risen to the challenge of constructing an identity which addresses its indigenous people's cultural needs for identity and recognition. The news media examined are thereby seen to have maintained or furthered division among Ladinos and Mayans. Though the situation is seen to have improved during the course of the last ten years, the construction of an identity which provides space for the free expression of all cultural backgrounds in Guatemala has yet to arrive.

### **7.3 Epilogue:**

As I am writing these lines in June 2006, Europe's newspapers are filled with reports of the World Cup. Germany, write Der Spiegel, BBC Online and Dagsavisen, appears to have found a new identity, celebrating itself along the success of its national team. Born in Germany, I have grown up with natural reservations regarding the concept of German nationalism. Yet questions raised during my fieldtrip appeared to have caught up with me much closer to home. Many of the concepts introduced by my participants, such as the lack of a national identity, have struck a chord with me on a rather unexpected level. While I retained a nagging feeling of unease when reflecting the thought of a national Guatemalan identity during the course of my writing, the course of events appears to have overtaken my personal agenda. Germany, Europe's cranky and sulking pessimist, re-imagines itself as an open country, bringing the concept of nationalism onto a newer, lighter, happier level. The Germans, or perhaps I should even say We, have the Holocaust, but we also have Goethe. We have Weissbier and Kebab, and we feel that we can begin to enjoy our cultural peculiarities without forgetting our historical legacy. National identity thereby becomes a different concept, towards the embracement and celebration of cultural diversity and away from the twisted imagination of racial differences and borders drawn by white men, who died a long time ago.



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